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Jet Li injured by tsunami in Maldives

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Kidnap victim's remains found in Cotabato City

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Bin Laden urges Iraqis to boycott polls

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Laxity in security eyed in deadly PNP gunplay

■ 2bU! / C1
The year that was in music

North Pole is melting; Santa may move south

BAKA MA-
RELOCATE
SI SANTA!

OSLO—Santa may have to move his workshop from the North Pole because global warming is thawing the ice beneath his elves' and reindeers' feet.

"Santa's workshop is in dire straits. The platform

NORTH/ A7

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

This time we'll be stricter on firecrackers, pledges PNP

By Christian V. Esguerra

THIS time, we'll be stricter—or so said Philippine National Police Director General Edgar Aglipay—in implementing the law against illegal firecrackers.

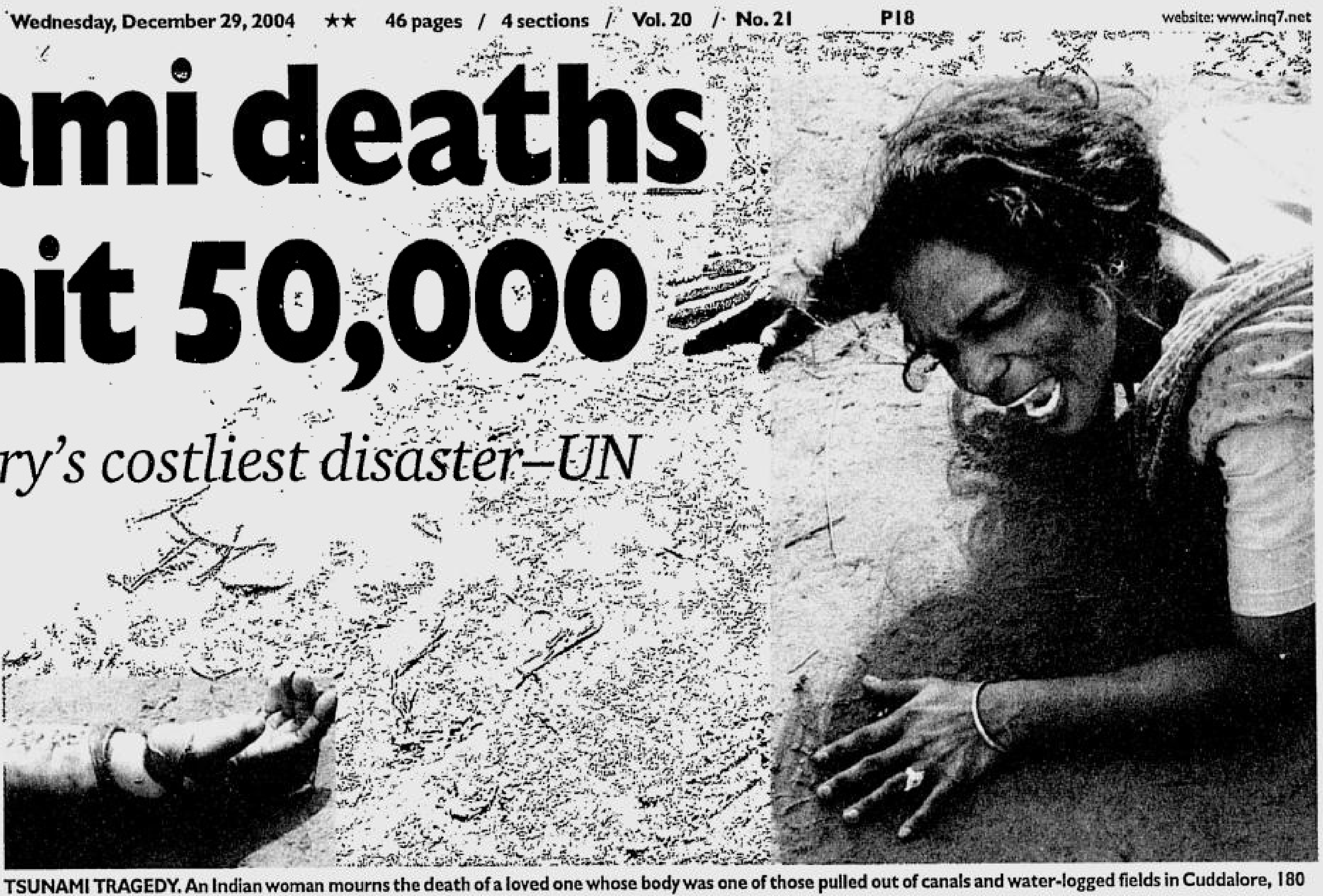
Aglipay yesterday promised that at the height of the revelry on Dec. 31, policemen

THIS TIME/ A7

email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph Wednesday, December 29, 2004 ★★ 46 pages / 4 sections / Vol. 20 / No. 21 P18 website: www.inq7.net

Tsunami deaths may hit 50,000

It may be history's costliest disaster—UN



TSUNAMI TRAGEDY. An Indian woman mourns the death of a loved one whose body was one of those pulled out of canals and water-logged fields in Cuddalore, 180 km south of the Indian city of Madras. The killer waves killed more than 4,000 people in India alone. REUTERS

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia—Mourners in Sri Lanka buried their dead with their bare hands on Tuesday as rescuers rushed to check isolated pockets of Indonesia for survivors of the explosive giant waves that the United Nations said may be history's costliest natural disaster.

More than 40,000 people were confirmed dead. But some estimates placed the potential death toll at 50,000.

Eleven nations in the densely populated band of destruction spanning as far as Africa tallied corpses as they filled tropical beaches and choked hospital morgues. The International Red Cross feared malaria and cholera would add to the toll as aid agencies mounted what UN officials said would be the world's biggest relief effort.

"This is unprecedented," said Yvette Stevens, an emergency relief coordinator of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Desperate foreigners sought kin missing from holidays in Southeast Asia, where news of an unclaimed, blond 2-year-old boy brought dozens of hopeful parents to a hospital in Thailand's resort island of Phuket. They all left disappointed—except for his Swedish uncle.

A man who identified himself only as Jim said he found his nephew, Hannes Bergstroem, by looking on the Web. "This is a

TSUNAMI/ A6

DEATH TOLL
BY COUNTRY

- Sri Lanka: 18,706
- Indonesia: 19,000
- India: 4,371
- Thailand: 1,500
- Malaysia: 60
- Myanmar: 90
- Maldives: 43
- Somalia: Hundreds
- Tanzania: 10
- Seychelles: 3
- Bangladesh: 2

The International Red Cross has reported 23,700 deaths

5 Filipinos hurt in tsunami-hit Phuket

By TJ Burgonio, Jerome Aning, Alcuin Papa and Blanche S. Rivera

FIVE Filipinos, including four women, were among the thousands hurt in Phuket, Thailand, after earthquake-spawned tidal waves slammed into coastal areas in nine countries last Sunday, Department of Foreign Affairs officials said yesterday.

Earlier, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo had dispatched an embassy staffer to Phuket to identify any Filipinos on the list of eight casualties with Filipino-sounding names released by the Thai Ministry of Interior.

The five hurt in the tsunami were Marco Sangil, Vergini Cruz, Miss Virginia, Margaret Ang-Choi, who were all confined at the Vichara Hospital, and Rosemarie Phi King Ang-Tan, who was confined at Patong Hospital. Both hospitals are in Phuket.

"Ms Rosemarie Phi King Ang-Tan is confined for minor injuries. The four others in the Vichara Hospital—we have not received any information from the embassy as to the nature of their injuries," DFA spokesperson Gilberto Asuque said at a press briefing.

Officials could not say if those injured were working in or touring Phuket when giant waves smashed into homes, restaurants and hotels on the island and other coastal areas in Thailand on Sunday.

An estimated 70 to 120 Filipinos are based

5 FILIPINOS/ A6

LIFE LIMPS on for this man as he walks past a destroyed market building in Banda Aceh. The Indonesian province suffered a double whammy from Sunday's devastating earthquake and the tsunami it triggered. AP

GMA orders modernization of RP weather forecasting

By Desiree Caluza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau
and Norman Bordadora

BAGUIO CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo said the government would start the full modernization of its weather forecasting system to help the country be better prepared for disasters, including tsunamis.

The President's statement came after she expressed sympathy to the victims of the tsunamis that hit the coastlines of southern Asian countries on Sunday.

Ms Arroyo, who is spending the Christmas and New Year holidays in this city, said the government was improving its forecasting facilities so that these could be linked to the warning systems of the mainland United States, Hawaii, Japan and China.

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon Soliman said the government had allotted P17 million to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) to upgrade its facilities.

Pagasa had come under scrutiny last month because of complaints that its storm signal warnings had come too late or were unreliable following a series of killer typhoons.

Aside from Pagasa, the government is also closely coordinating with the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) for disaster response.

Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz Jr., who talked to reporters here through a radio-patched conference, said the international linkup would result in a more accurate and timely forecasting system. The modernized system would also determine a more accurate reading of the amount of rainfall.

GMA ORDERS/ A6

Most Pinoys enter New Year with hope

MOST Filipinos are entering the New Year with hope rather than fear, but their numbers have declined sharply over the past two years, according a private polling firm.

Eighty-one percent of adult Filipinos were hopeful about the New Year, results of the survey conducted by Social Weather Stations nationwide from Nov. 23 to Dec. 2 showed.

This proportion is significantly lower than the 90 percent in 2003, and the 95 percent in the fourth quarter of 2002, SWS said in a statement yesterday.

When SWS first asked people if they were hopeful about the New Year at the end of 2000, 87 percent said they were. The following year it was 88 percent.

The latest survey also found that fewer adult Filipinos looked forward to a merry Christmas than those in the two Christmases past.

SWS said in a statement last week that the proportion of Filipinos who expected a happy Christmas fell to 64 percent this year from 77 percent in 2003 and 82 percent in 2002.

People pessimistic about their prospects next year also outnumbered those who were optimistic. Thirty percent expect their quality of life to get worse, while only 25 percent expect their quality of life to improve next year.

The survey covered 1,200 re-

MOST PINOYS/ A7

Jinggoy joining Erap for HK reunion

THE ESTRADAS will have a yearend reunion in Hong Kong with opposition Sen. Jinggoy Estrada set to leave today for the former Crown Colony to join his father and co-accused.

The Sandiganbayan special division granted Jinggoy's travel request yesterday, a day after his father, deposed President Joseph Estrada, left for Hong Kong to undergo knee surgery tomorrow. The antigraft court is trying father and son in a historic P4-billion plunder case.

Minutes after he got his wish, a pleased Jinggoy told reporters that he was booking a Philippine Airlines flight at noon today.

"I'm very, very grateful to the court for allowing me to check on the condition of my father," he said, adding that he and the rest of the family would spend New Year's Eve together in Hong Kong.

In an open court ruling, Senior Associate Justice Edilberto Sandoval said the Sandiganbayan had found Jinggoy's Dec. 17 request "meritorious" over the objections posed by state prosecutors.

Sandoval also said the court was giving Jinggoy up to Jan. 9 to return. But the court was silent on his spe-

JINGGOY / A5

ROOM WITH A VIEW. Former President Joseph Estrada sits by the window of the Hong Kong hospital where he will have his celebrated total knee replacement surgery tomorrow.

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Luzon and Visayas will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers becoming more frequent over the eastern sections. Mindanao will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with rainshowers and isolated thunderstorms.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/12/29/04

Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Cloudy with Rains	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Cloudy with Rains	Gen. Santos	Partly Cloudy
Tagaytay	Cloudy with Rains	Zamboanga	Partly Cloudy
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

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Second FRONT PAGE

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Court rejects Danding bid for SMC, UCPB

By Volt Contreras

THE SANDIGANBAYAN yesterday rejected for lack of merit the bid of businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco to regain control of major stakes in San Miguel Corp. and the United Coconut Planters Bank which were allegedly acquired through the controversial "coco levy" funds.

The anti-graft court's First Division upheld two landmark decisions that forfeited in favor of the government the "coco levy"-funded shares that cronies of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos acquired in SMC and UCPB and denied the motions for reconsideration filed by Cojuangco and other claimants in connection with the July 11, 2003 ruling on the UCPB shares and the May 7, 2004 ruling on the SMC shares.

"It is high time that the real beneficiaries of the coconut levy funds, the coconut farmers who contributed to it, and the entire coconut industry be given a chance to reap the benefits that are due them," the court said in its ruling on the SMC shares.

"The court finds no valid ground to merit reconsideration (of the May 2004 decision)," the 18-page ruling further read.

As to the UCPB shares, the court said, "no new issue was raised as they (Cojuangco et al.) mostly rehashed arguments which were already sufficiently and thoroughly passed upon by the court in the summary judgment in question."

In its May 2004 ruling on the SMC shares, the Sandiganbayan awarded to the government the 27-percent bloc of shares in the country's biggest food and beverage company. In July 2003, the anti-graft court forfeited 72.2 percent of UCPB's outstanding stocks in favor of the government.

The Sandiganbayan noted that defendant Cojuangco still maintains his stand that the coconut levy funds are not public funds, despite the Supreme Court decision "declaring the same to be prima facie funds and laying the burden on the defendants to prove that they have become legitimately private funds."

Yesterday's two resolutions were penned by division chair and recently appointed Presiding Justice Teresita Leonardo-de Castro. Associate Justices Diosdado Peralta and Francisco Villaruz concurred.

Aside from Cojuangco, claimants to the UCPB shares included the Philippine Coconut Federation (Cocofed) led by the late Zamboanga City Mayor Ma. Clara Lobregat, and former Marcos defense minister and now senator Juan Ponce Enrile.

The government sequestered both the UCPB shares and the 27-percent SMC stake in 1986, shortly after the Edsa people power revolution that toppled Marcos from power.

The Presidential Commission on Good Government, set up to recover the alleged ill-gotten wealth of Marcos and his associates, has been battling Cojuangco for decades over the coconut levy funds.

4 dead, 8 missing in Davao Sur landslide

DAVAO CITY—Heavy rains triggered a landslide in two remote villages in Davao del Sur on Sunday, killing at least four people.

Eight other people had been reported missing, according to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) here.

Carmelito Lupo, OCD regional director, said 39 houses in Barangays San Antonio and Datu Intan in Sta. Maria town were also destroyed when the landslide occurred Sunday afternoon.

The OCD identified the fatalities as siblings Cheche, Boboy and Cristel Jumamon, and Fedilita Cabişa. Their ages were not immediately available.

The eight missing have yet to be identified.

Lupo said he was able to talk with Sta. Maria Mayor Rudy Mariscal yesterday morning, who told him that the two affected barangays remained inaccessible.

Lupo also said that aside from San Antonio and Datu Intan, the villages of San Pedro, San Juan, Kinilidan, Pongpong and San Isidro were also affected by the landslide but no casualties were reported there.

However, some crops were damaged, Lupo said.

He said the search for the missing victims was continuing but admitted that officials fear they might have also died in the incident.

Gen. Ernesto Carolina (ret.), vice chair of the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC), said the affected families are temporarily housed in the schools in Barangays Datu Intan and San Antonio.

Carolina said the disaster coordinating councils in Davao del Sur have extended medical assistance and relief goods to the displaced residents.

Four years ago, a similar incident hit the towns of Malita and Sta. Maria in Davao del Sur, and resulted in the death of dozens of people, including children. *Joselle dR. Badilla and Anthony Allada, PDI Mindanao Bureau and Alcuin Papa in Manila*

Revenue-sharing urged between gov't, Piatco to get Naia 3 running

By Carlito Pablo

TWO ADMINISTRATION congressmen yesterday proposed the adoption of a revenue-sharing scheme between the government and Philippine International Air Terminals Co. (Piatco) in the operation of the new Terminal 3 of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

Lakas Representatives Monico Puentevella (Bacolod City) and Isidro Real (Zamboanga del Sur) said such an arrangement could result in the immediate settlement of the government's dispute with Piatco and "expedite the opening" of the terminal.

Puentevella and Real said in a joint statement the scheme would be the most practical option as it would entail no additional financial burden on the government.

"Under the scheme, there will be no need for the government to borrow money to pay Piatco, which would add to the country's debt," they said.

The government and the Piatco consortium that built Terminal 3 are locked in a legal dispute over the project following President Macapagal-Arroyo's 2002 decision to annul the five contracts awarded to Piatco to build and operate the terminal.

The government's decision was affirmed in May 2003 by the Supreme Court which voided all five contracts. The SC ruled that the contracts were contrary to public policy and violated the Build-Operate-Transfer Law and approved the government takeover of Terminal 3.

But the high court said that Piatco, a consortium that includes the German-based Fraport AG, should be compensated.

Piatco is seeking compensation of at least $550 million but the government is offering only $350 million.

The government has offered P3 billion (about $54 million) as down payment but this was refused by the consortium.

Fraport has filed an arbitration case before the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes in Washington.

Piatco in its turn has filed a recovery case with the Singapore-based International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce.

Acting on an expropriation petition filed by the government last week, the Pasay City Regional Trial Court granted a writ of possession, paving the way for the government to open Terminal 3 for operation by the middle of 2005.

Puentevella said that as chair of the House committee on transportation and communications, he can "volunteer to represent Congress in the negotiating panel to seek a win-win solution."

"It is better for both the government and Piatco to immediately settle the issue to prevent more losses," he said.

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'GIFT OF TRUST BEST OF ALL'

British couple moved by Pinay's generosity

By Christian V. Esguerra

CHARITY can be found in the most unexpected places.

For the typhoon victims in Infanta, Quezon, it occurred in a Parañaque City supermarket on a Saturday morning before Christmas.

Advertising executive Venus Navalta was shopping for groceries to donate to the typhoon victims when the five pushcarts that she topped with rice, sardines, noodles, juices and coffee caught the attention of a British couple as she approached the checkout counter.

David Munns, 64, and his 62-year-old wife Ann found it quite unusual for someone to be buying so many groceries, even for the Christmas season.

"How come you're buying so many of these?" David, a Singapore-based engineer, asked her.

"They're not for me, they're for typhoon victims in Quezon," Navalta replied with a smile.

Touched by her generosity, David and his wife took out P10,000 in cash and handed it over to Navalta.

Basins of goods

The donation sent Navalta back to the shelves to get more goods.

At the end of the shopping spree, Navalta had 130 basins filled with relief goods. Each basin, a recyclable substitute for boxes, also contained an additional can of sardines, two more packs of noodles, a half kilo of sugar and a can of condensed milk.

Navalta and the Munnses will distribute the goodies today during a post-Christmas party in Infanta, one of three Quezon towns ravaged by two successive typhoons more than three weeks ago.

Overwhelmed

More than the cash donation, Navalta said she was overwhelmed by the trust that the British couple placed in her.

The Munnses had no qualms about handing over their money to a complete stranger who could have kept the money for herself.

"To me that's the best gift, the gift of trust," she said in an interview.

As soon as she left the store, Venus sent text messages to friends, telling them about the couple's generosity. They too promised to shop for typhoon victims. Some of them will be joining today's relief operation.

David Munns said the sight of Navalta with those five carts at the checkout counter was enough to convince them she was no phony.

"She was doing something which I thought was great," Munns said.

David and his wife have been in and out of the Philippines since 1969, the year they first ventured into the local drilling business.

More Pinoy than Brit

To David, his family seems more Filipino than British. Their three children grew up speaking fluent Filipino, he said. They love *sinigang* and *adobo*, *simbang gabi*, *puto bumbong* and *bibingka*.

Their son Mark is married to a Filipina, their daughter Tracy to a Filipino engineer working in the family-owned company. Rachel, their youngest, was born in Manila.

Though David and his wife are now based in Singapore, they come once every two months to visit their five grandchildren. They also rent a house in Parañaque.

The family has no difficulty relating to anything that happens in the Philippines, particularly to calamities like the one that befell Quezon and surrounding provinces.

To the Munns, it was like tragedy had struck their own home.

David grew up in Ramsey, a small community near Cambridge, England, and comes from a family of modest means. He said he worked at odd jobs and was a builder before studying engineering and going into business.

Filipinos love to cook

He said there were many Filipinos in Ramsey who were very much appreciated for their culture and work ethic.

"There we can be in one house and enjoy each other's company. Whenever there's a get-together, Filipinos go straight to the kitchen and cook. They cook well. We love the way they do things, they're so loving and caring," he said.

David said a principle that he has seen so often exhibited by and so appreciated among Filipinos concerns good deeds— that when one does good, he feels good.

That Saturday morning at the supermarket, he and his wife Ann walked out smiling.

World's top mining firms expected at RP conference

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo expects officials of the world's leading mining companies to converge on the Philippines in February to attend a government-sponsored mining conference.

"They (foreign mining firms) are just waiting for that. They want to come and invest in the Philippines," Ms Arroyo told a press conference in Baguio City on Monday night.

The President is leading the government's all-out promotion of the mining industry following the Supreme Court's ruling affirming the constitutionality of the Mining Act of 1995 after years in legal limbo.

Board of Investments Undersecretary Elmer Hernandez said the government had sent invitations to the world's leading mining companies, bankers and contractors for the Philippine mining conference, which would precede the World Mining Conference in Africa from Feb. 3 to 5. *Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.*

Cabinet revamp urged in new year

THE OPPOSITION yesterday urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to revamp her Cabinet to usher in the new year with new faces.

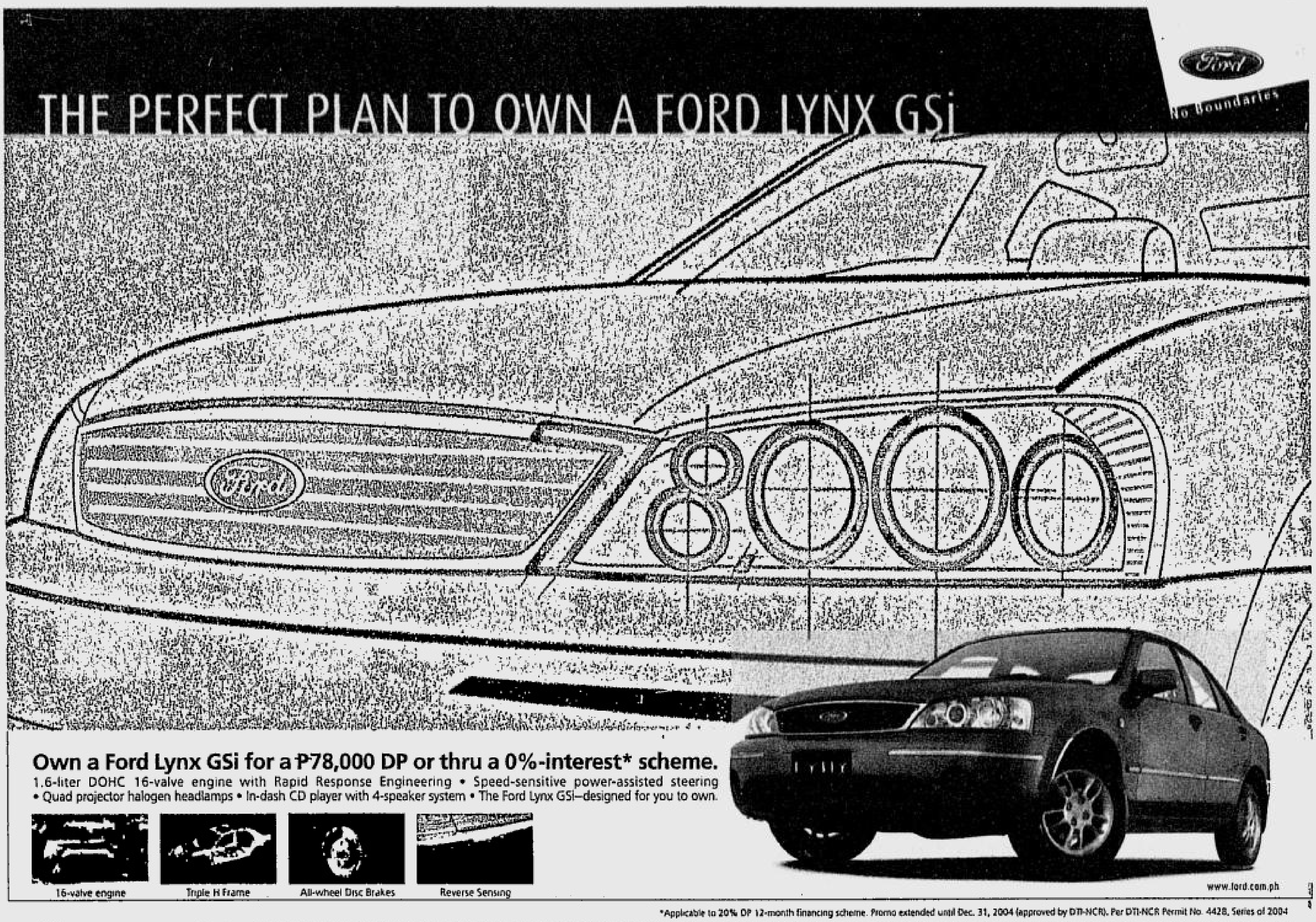
Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. (PDP-Laban) said the President would be doing "herself and the nation a favor if she would push ahead with the reported plan to make some changes in her Cabinet by yearend."

But he said the Cabinet revamp should not be limited to those who wish to go back to the private sector or to retire from the public service.

Pimentel confirmed reports that the President had been scouting for replacements for Energy Secretary Vincent Perez, who wants to return to the private sector, and for Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong, who had filed for retirement.

Perez had incurred the ire of administration allies in Congress for his failure to prevent the continuous rise in oil prices and for the alleged mismanagement of the debt-ridden National Power Corp.

The opposition senator said it was time the President signed the walking papers of Perez. *Michael Lim Ubac*



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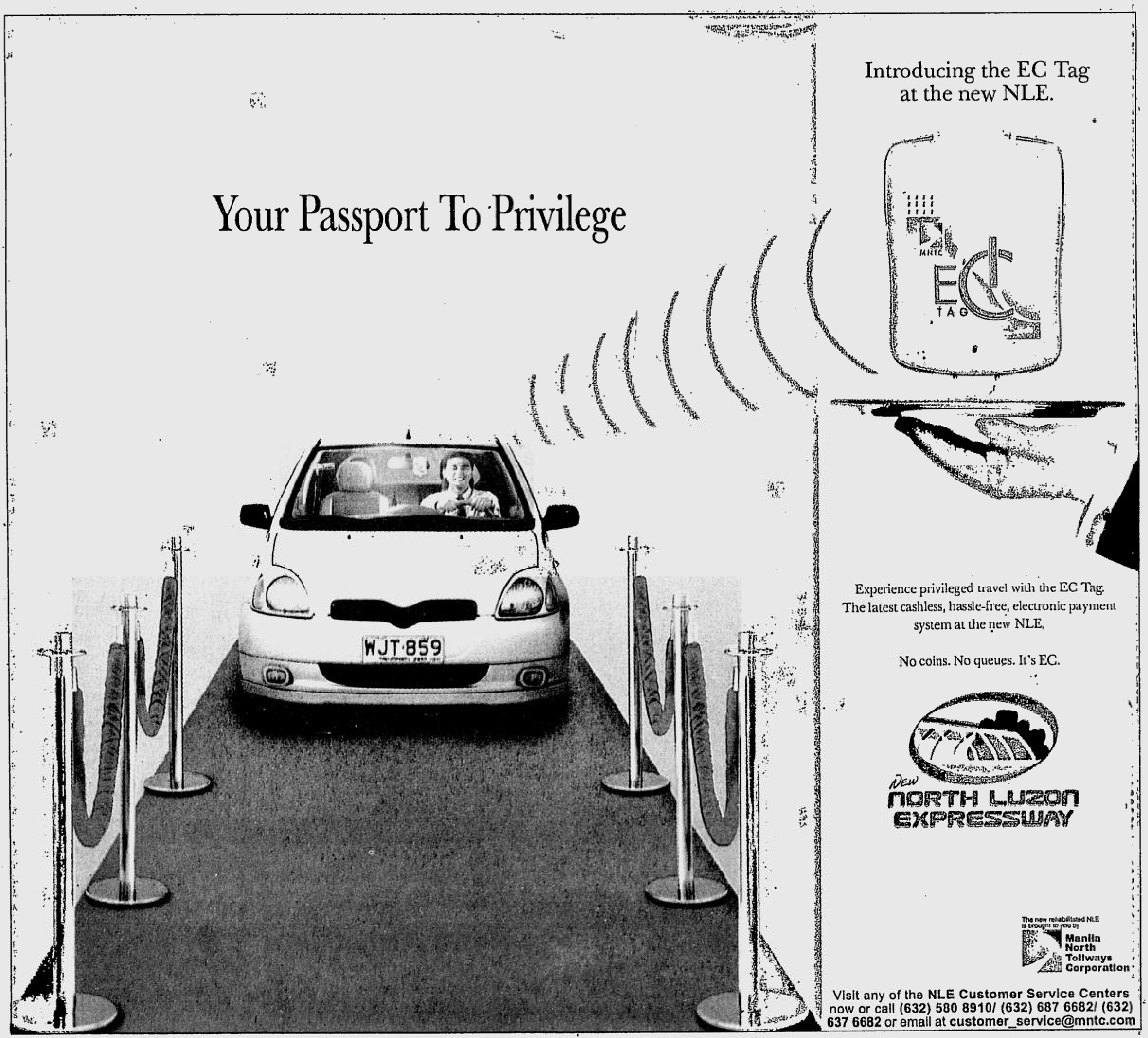

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No plans to raise class size in public schools, says Abad

EDUCATION Secretary Florencio Abad has denied a reported plan to cram more students into classrooms to cope with the increasing enrollment in the public schools.

"I don't know where that came from because our target is to bring down the class size," Abad told reporters yesterday.

A Department of Education order had reportedly been drafted raising the standard class size from 50 to 65 students.

Designed to accommodate only 45 students, classrooms in the public schools had been forced in the last several years to take in more students due to the severe classroom shortage.

In some schools in Metro Manila and other urban centers, class sizes go up to 80 pupils.

The draft DepEd order said it was increasing class size in anticipation of increased enrollment next year.

But Abad denied plans to officially raise the standard class size to 65.

Migration

He admitted, however, that the average class size could go up next year due to the "migration" of students to the public schools.

Enrollment in the public schools has risen sharply in recent years as more students leave the private schools due to the hard times. Public schools do not charge tuition, only minimal miscellaneous fees.

Abad said public high school enrollment is growing at four percent a year while that in public elementary schools is increasing at one percent per year.

He said the problem of crammed classrooms is more pronounced in high schools, particularly in Quezon City, Antipolo City, Cavite and Bulacan, where he said the average class size is 80.

"What we want to do is bring that down. (A class size of) 65 is already very crowded. It's not conducive to learning," he said.

Abad said the country is short about 57,000 classrooms, but education activists estimate the shortage is much higher than that.

Dona Z. Pazzibugan

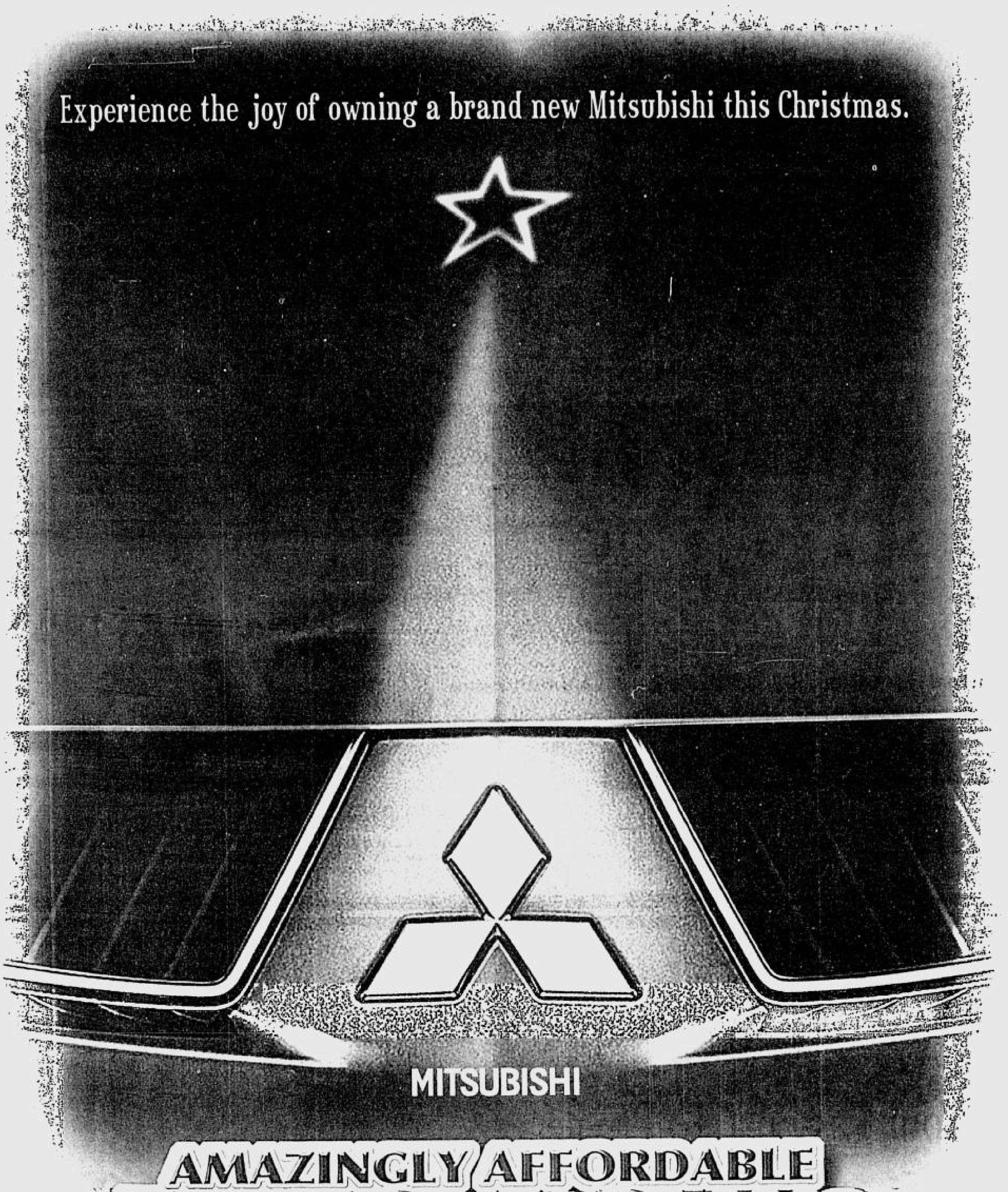
Standard ed's mother dies at 87

LOLITA Veloso Ngkaion Yap, mother of Manila Standard editor-in-chief Jullie Yap Daza, died on Dec. 27 at the age of 87.

She is survived by her children and inlaws Tito Daza, Larry and Eliza, Pat, Millie, Angie, Jojo and Dave Lambrose, and Bernadette; grandchildren Pat-P and Mike Planas, Peter and Bing, Paul, Penny and Mike Tuviera, Laurence, Lloyd, Patrick, Philip, Francis and Marc; and great-grandchildren Mikey, Patrick, Peter and Gabbie.

Her remains lie at Arlington Memorial Chapels, Quezon City. Interment will be on Dec. 30 at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City, after the 8 a.m. Mass at Arlington.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations be made to Christ the King Parish Church, Filinvest II, Batasan Hills, QC.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Lancer GLS CVT	758,000	38,700	31,846	22,632	18,149	15,917	14,437
Lancer MX CVT	838,000	65,700	35,207	25,020	20,065	17,597	15,961
Adventure GL (Dsl)	675,000	81,250	28,359	20,154	16,162	14,174	12,856
Adventure GLX (Gas)	700,000	85,000	29,400	20,900	16,760	14,699	13,332
Adventure GLX (Dsl)	740,000	58,000	31,090	22,094	17,718	15,539	14,094
Adventure GLS Sport M/T (Gas)	795,000	79,250	33,400	23,737	19,035	16,694	15,142
Adventure GLS Sport A/T (Gas)	848,000	107,200	35,627	25,319	20,304	17,807	16,151
Adventure GLS Sport (Dsl)	805,000	80,750	33,821	24,035	19,275	16,904	15,332
Adventure GLS Sport M/T Lmtd. Ed. (Gas)	835,000	105,250	35,081	24,931	19,993	17,534	15,904
Adventure GLS Sport A/T Lmtd. Ed. (Gas)	888,000	113,200	37,308	26,513	21,262	18,647	16,913
Adventure GLS Sport Lmtd. Ed. (Dsl.)	845,000	106,750	35,501	25,229	20,232	17,744	16,094
Adventure Grand Sport (Dsl)	935,000	105,250	39,282	27,917	22,387	19,634	17,808
Adventure Grand Sport A/T (Gas)	980,000	127,000	41,173	29,260	23,465	20,579	18,665
L200 Strada A/T	1,230,000	150,000	50,692	36,025	28,890	25,337	23,197
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MITSUBISHI MOTORS

Jinggoy joining Erap for HK reunion

From page A1

cific request to be granted "continuing authority" to make repeated trips from Manila to Hong Kong to see his father.

90-percent sure

The deadline for Estrada's return is Jan. 15, but Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said he might stay longer in Hong Kong with the Sandiganbayan's permission.

"It will depend on his doctor. I'm sure—no, I'm confident—that the Sandiganbayan would authorize an extension of his stay there if his health situation requires it," Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez also said he was "90-percent sure" that the deposed President would eventually return: "It would be to his disadvantage if he does not come back.

"If I were his lawyer, I would advise him to come back because that would be in his interest. It would be dangerous if he doesn't because the court could continue with the trial without him."

According to Gonzalez, Estrada could lose his case if he did not return to defend himself.

He said the political opposition also needed Estrada to return for it to remain unified.

"He is a rallying point of the opposition," Gonzalez said. He said the government had contingency plans if the former President decided not to come back.

High anxiety

At yesterday's hearing at the Sandiganbayan, Estrada lawyer Rene Saguisag said the ex-President's family was in "an occasion of great anxiety and uncertainty" considering the risks faced by his 67-year-old client during surgery.

"Anything can happen ... so we want the son to be present," Saguisag told the court.

It was the third time the Sandiganbayan allowed Jinggoy to travel overseas since he was allowed to post bail of P500,000 in 2003.

His two previous trips, taken when he was already a senator, were both to the United States for which he posted a P100,000 cash bond.

Conciliatory response

Estrada arrived at Hong Kong Adventist Hospital at around 7 p.m. on Monday, accompanied by his wife, Sen. Luisa Ejercito-Estrada, and his police escorts.

Before leaving Manila, he vowed to come back to fight the Arroyo administration's "reign of corruption and mismanagement."

"Upon my return. I will organize a strong opposition party. The country needs a strong opposition," he said.

But Malacañang had only a conciliatory response: Concentrate on your knee surgery first.

"It would do former President Estrada much more good if he were to put politics out of his mind at least for a while and just concentrate on having a successful knee surgery," said Gabriel Claudio, President Macapagal-Arroyo's adviser on political affairs.

He said there was no truth to Estrada's description of the Arroyo administration, but added: "We wish him well on his operation."

Silvestre Afable III, Ms Arroyo's adviser on communications, took a similar tack.

"I respectfully suggest that [Estrada] take care of his illness first, for which we wish him well," Afable said. "We will welcome his suggestions for good governance and anticorruption, and we are glad he has taken up these causes."

Compassion

In Baguio City, Ms Arroyo reiterated her policy of compassion toward her predecessor.

"I believe that as far as the treatment of his person is concerned, within the parameters of justice, we should render him humanitarian treatment for the sake of the many who see in his condition a mirror of their own oppression," she said at a press conference on Monday night when asked about Estrada's departure for Hong Kong.

Ms Arroyo said she respected the court's decision to allow Estrada to undergo medical treatment in Hong Kong up to Jan. 15.

She recalled that as early as her first State of the Nation Address in 2001, she stated her policy that the wheels of justice must turn but Estrada should be accorded humanitarian treatment in deference to his followers.

The President made a passing remark about Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson's charge that she had entered into a compromise with Estrada by allowing him to leave.

Singson had earlier aired the belief that Estrada was gone for good.

"Now as far as Gov. Chavit Singson is concerned, he is an ally, he remains an ally. Allies do not always agree with each other, but [he] remains an ally," Ms Arroyo said.

Unification

In a phone interview, Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. disagreed with speculation that Estrada would not return to the Philippines after his medical treatment.

"He's coming back; he will not disappear," Pimentel said, and issued the reminder that after Estrada was deposed in 2001, he had been offered exile abroad but had refused.

Pimentel said he agreed with Estrada that a strong opposition was needed.

He said the opposition in the Senate was "fragmented" and in need of unification, and cited as "a devastating example" the "rift" between Senators Edgardo Angara and Panfilo Lacson.

The rift began when Angara, president of the opposition Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, supported the presidential candidacy of the late Fernando Poe Jr. *Reports from Volt Contreras, Philip C. Tubeza, Juliet Labog-Javellana and Christine O. Avendano*

ho ho ho!

BDO pen for the holidays

DECEMBER 24, FRIDAY

9:00 am - 2:00 pm Aurora Blvd Baclaran Carmen Planas 9:00 am - 4:00 pm NAIA	9:30 am - 2:30 pm Bonifacio Global City Cebu-Elizabeth Mall Cubao SM Echague	Makati SM Mall of Asia SM Delgado	10:00 am - 3:00 pm *All SM Mall Branches*

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All Sunday Banking Branches are open	9:00 am - 6:00 pm NAIA	10:00 am - 6:00 pm Mega B L/G

DECEMBER 27, MONDAY

8:00 am - 2:00 pm Carmen Planas Tabora 8:30 am - 2:30 pm Baclaran Bacoor Calamba Legaspi City Lucena	Marikina Marcos Highway Naga San Pedro 9:00 am - 3:00 pm Alabang Aurora Blvd. Cainta Kalentong	Libis Mall of Asia Pasig 9:00 am - 6:00 pm NAIA 9:30 am - 3:30 pm Cubao SM Makati SM	Echague SM Delgado Bonifacio Global City Cebu-Elizabeth Mall Tutuban 10:00 am - 4:00 pm *All SM Mall Branches*

DECEMBER 30, THURSDAY

8:00 am - 1:00 pm Carmen Planas 9:00 am - 2:00 pm Aurora Blvd.	9:00 am - 4:00 pm NAIA 9:30 am - 2:30 pm Bonifacio Global City	Cebu-Elizabeth Mall Cubao SM Echague Makati SM SM Delgado	10:00 am - 3:00 pm *All SM Mall Branches*

DECEMBER 31, FRIDAY

8:00 am - 1:00 pm Cebu-Tabunok 8:30 am - 1:30 pm Bacoor Baclaran CDO Cogon CDO Xavier Cebu-Magallanes Dagupan Davao-Monteverde Iloilo-Iznart Iloilo-JM Basa	Legaspi City Lucena Marcos Highway Marikina Naga Rizal Avenue San Pedro Tacloban Tarlac Tomas Morato Zamboanga	9:00 am - 2:00 pm Alabang Aurora Blvd. Baguio-Session Rd. Caloocan Greenhills Head Office Libis 9:00 am - 6:00 pm NAIA	9:30 am - 2:30 pm Bonifacio Global City Cebu-Elizabeth Mall Cubao SM Echague Magallanes Village Makati SM SM Delgado 10:00 am - 3:00 pm *All SM Mall Branches*

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PICKING UP THE PIECES. Indian survivors carry what is left of their worldly possessions to safety in Madras in the aftermath of the killer waves that struck the area on Sunday. The government said the death toll in India alone could reach more than 9,400. REUTERS

Tsunami deaths may hit 50,000

From page A1

miracle, the biggest thing that could happen," he said.

Almost a third of the dead were children. Thousands of people were missing, and millions homeless.

About 18,706 people were confirmed dead in Sri Lanka, nearly 19,000 in Indonesia, more than 4,000 in India and more than 1,500 in Thailand—with numbers expected to rise.

The Indonesian vice president's estimate that his country's coastlines alone held up to 25,000 victims could bring the total death toll to as high as 50,000. Contact has yet to be restored with many coastal areas in the direct path of the giant waves.

"Accurate data is not yet here, but I estimate 21,000 to 25,000 people," Yusuf Kalla told reporters late Monday after visiting victims in Banda Aceh, some 2,000 km northeast of Jakarta.

Sri Lankan officials expected their country's death toll to reach 20,000, while Thai officials said that as many as 2,000 may have died in their country.

Indian officials said thousands living on the remote Andaman and Nicobar islands, near the epicenter of the powerful earthquake, were still missing. Many areas of the island chain had not been reached.

Aftershocks

Islands way off India's east coast suffered aftershocks of Sunday's undersea 9.0-magnitude quake in the Indian Ocean that shot concussions of water onto tropical coasts from Indonesia to Somalia.

In Sri Lanka's severely hit town of Galle, officials mounted a loudspeaker on a fire engine to advise residents to lay bodies of the dead on roads for collection and burial. Elsewhere in Sri Lanka, residents took on burial efforts with forks or even bare hands to scrape a final resting place for victims.

Rescue workers battled to reach isolated coasts on the Indonesian island of Sumatra nearest the epicenter of Sunday's monstrous quake—the world's biggest in 40 years. Soldiers and volunteers combed seaside districts and dug into rubble of destroyed houses to seek survivors and retrieve the dead.

"We are working 24 hours to get people out," said Red Cross worker Tamin Faisil in Banda Aceh on Sumatra.

In Thailand's once-thriving resorts, volunteers dragged scores of corpses—including many foreign tourists—from beaches, inland pools and the debris of once-ritzy hotels. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra warned that his country's toll could double.

The stench of death hung in the air for a 30-km stretch of beach in Thailand's southern province of Phang Na, just above Phuket. Near the devastated Similan Beach and Spa Resort, where mostly German tourists were staying, naked corpse hung suspended from a tree as if crucified.

Miraculous stories

Amid the devastation, however, were some miraculous stories of survival.

In Malaysia, a 20-day-old baby was found alive on a floating mattress. She and her family were later reunited. The 2-year-old boy was recovering at a hospital after he was found sitting alone on a road. His parents were missing and presumed dead.

For others, the pain of their loss was almost impossible to come to terms with.

"Where are my children?" asked 41-year-old Absah, as she searched for her 11 youngsters in Banda Aceh, the Indonesian city closest to Sunday's epicenter. "Where are they? Why did this happen to me? I've lost everything."

The disaster could be history's costliest, with "many billions of dollars" of damage, said UN Undersecretary Jan Egeland, who is in charge of emergency relief coordination.

Hundreds of thousands have lost everything, and millions face a hazardous future because of polluted drinking water, a lack of sanitation and no health services, he said.

Scores of people were also killed in Malaysia, Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh, the Maldives.

The powerful waves—triggered by the 9.0 magnitude quake off Sumatra—raced 4,500 km across the Indian Ocean to Africa, wreaking death and destruction as far as Somalia, where hundreds were killed, and the Seychelles, where three died.

It was the deadliest known tsunami since the one caused by the 1883 volcanic eruption at Krakatoa—located off Sumatra's southern tip—which killed an estimated 36,000 people.

Biggest victims

Children have emerged as the biggest victims of Sunday's quake-borne tidal waves—thousands and thousands drowned, battered and washed away by huge walls of water that have decimated an entire generation of Asians.

The UN organization estimates at least one-third of the tens of thousands who died were children, said Unicef spokesperson Alfred Ironside in New York.

Officials in Thailand and Indonesia conceded that immediate public warnings of gigantic waves could have saved lives. The only known warning issued by Thai authorities reached resort operators when it was too late. The waves hit Sri Lanka and India more than two hours after the quake.

But governments insisted they couldn't have known the true danger because there was no international system in place to track tsunamis in the Indian Ocean, and they could not afford the sophisticated equipment to build one.

For most people around the shores across the region, the only warning of Sunday's disaster came when shallow coastal waters disappeared, sucked away by the approaching tsunami, before returning as a massive wall of water.

The waves wiped out villages, lifted cars and boats, yanked children from the arms of parents and swept away beach goers, scuba divers and fishermen.

The United States dispatched disaster teams and prepared a $15-million aid package to the Asian countries, and the 25-nation European Union promised to deliver euro3 million (US$4 million). Japan, China and Russia were sending teams of experts.

Egeland said he expected hundreds of relief airplanes from two dozen countries within the next 48 hours. *Reports from AP, AFP and Reuters*

GMA orders modernization of RP ...

From page A1

Cruz, however, said officials were urging the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) to hasten the completion of geo-hazard maps. "With the geo-hazard maps, we can be forewarned and evacuate the people immediately," Soliman said.

Phivolcs maintains 64 seismic stations all over the country. Of these, 30 are linked to a satellite that processes data generated from the field, according to Phivolcs chief Renato Solidum. The rest are managed by personnel and the information generated from there is relayed by phone or radio.

Seismographs, or machines that record quakes, are hooked up to a satellite at the Phivolcs office in Quezon City. Installed in 2002 through a P1-billion grant from Japan, the satellite analyzes the seismic data from any of the network laid out across the country.

Tsunamis originating from the Pacific Ocean, on the eastern side of the Philippines, are being monitored by Phivolcs with the help of the Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC).

Solidum said Phivolcs' 2004 budget for maintenance and operations was only P25 million.

Two research divisions rely on a P1.5-million budget, while funds for other researches are drawn from operations, he said.

Solidum said Phivolcs needed more funds to work in the field and produce new maps and digital planimetry (measurement of the area of a plane figure).

Tsunami awareness campaign

He called for a massive tsunami awareness campaign for communities that lie on the archipelago's long coastline.

Solidum, however, expressed concern on how communities in the country's coastal areas would react to the warnings transmitted by the PTWC and the soon-to-be established warning system led by Japan.

"The warnings would be sent via satellite to the national government. The question is: Would the communities in the coastal areas know how to use this (warning) information?" Solidum said at a news conference.

He called on concerned government agencies, nongovernment organizations and the media to disseminate how to systematically deal with tsunami alerts to minimize the threat to life and limb.

Solidum said that as part of the PTWC network, the Philippines expected to receive as well as transmit tsunami-related information.

He said the tsunami warning alliance being formed by Japan and several other Asian countries would have its first meeting in Japan in January.

New tsunami institute

Japan will set up a center in March to better alert its neighbors, an official in Tokyo said yesterday.

The Tokyo-based center will monitor the impact of earthquakes in the Pacific region from Siberia to Indonesia, but will not cover the Indian Ocean, a Japan Meteorological Agency official said.

He said quake-prone Japan was the only country capable of predicting tsunami waves within three to four minutes of a tremor. "We will issue warnings more quickly and in more details than the system currently in place," he said.

The new Tokyo institute, tentatively called the Northwest Pacific Tsunami Information Center, will monitor quakes of 7.0 or more on the Richter scale and employ a greater number of observation sites, the Japanese official said.

The Japanese center will give warnings initially to five countries: Indonesia, one of the hardest hit by Sunday's tsunamis, along with China, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and South Korea.

Phivolcs needs to shorten its processing time to less than five minutes in locating the epicenter and determining its magnitude, and relay the information at once to communities at risk, according to Dr. Raymundo Punongbayan, former Phivolcs chief.

He suggested that government formalize an order making earthquake drills a requirement. *With reports from Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. in Manila; Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk, and AFP*

5 Filipinos hurt in tsunami-hit Phuket

From page A1

in the island resort, working as diving instructors, hotel staff and musicians. The government estimated that some 1,500 people were killed in Thailand and more than 7,000 injured.

On Sunday, a 9.0-magnitude earthquake under the Indian Ocean near Sumatra, Indonesia, unleashed a tsunami that battered southern Thailand and later India and Sri Lanka and several other countries.

Ang-Tan's husband, David Tan, a British national, and their daughter Sharleen May are missing. Consular staff members were scouring hospitals, hotels and other establishments to look for them, Asuque said.

Ang-Choi, one of the injured Filipinos, was married to Choi Chung Huen, a British passport holder who was among those killed and was earlier erroneously identified as a Filipino by the Thai Ministry of Interior.

Eight fatalities

The DFA was furnished a list of eight casualties with Filipino-sounding names, namely: Barrera Jann, Curlos Barong, Major Tomas, Mary Tanagtong, Sesilvia Bargoa, Sevrine Pairuno, Flona Gallan and Feri Cornelia.

"The bodies are being preserved, and the Thai ministry has requested the Philippine Embassy for assistance in verifying the names of the eight individuals," Asuque told reporters in a briefing.

Since the department could not confirm if any of them was a Filipino from its databank of passport applications, officials decided to release their names to the press "to expedite verification."

"We are releasing the Filipino-sounding names through the media so this would reach relatives in the Philippines. Hopefully, someone would recognize their names," Asuque said.

So far, the DFA has not received any report of casualties, injuries or the disappearance of Filipinos in Malaysia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia in the aftermath of the disaster, Asuque said.

Relatives of any of the eight casualties should contact Sheila Solas of the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs at 834-4594.

Inquiries about overseas Filipinos affected by the tsunami should call the DFA Action Center at 834-3333 or the Overseas Workers' Welfare Administration Operations Center at 833-6992 or 833-Owwa, 551-6641, 551-1560; fax nos. 804-0638, 551-6651; website: www.owwa.gov.ph; e-mail: opcenter@owwa.gov.ph.

Ship crew safe

Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas yesterday said 73 Filipino crewmen manning a luxury ship in the Indian Ocean, as well as seven overseas Filipino entertainers in Phuket, Thailand, were confirmed safe.

The Owwa OpCenter reported that all the 73 Filipino seafarers manning the luxury liner "Silver Cloud" were safe based on the confirmation given by the seafarers' Jebsens Manning Agency in Manila.

Sto. Tomas said the OpCenter was also getting in touch with the manning agencies to monitor and confirm the safety of Filipino seafarers on the following vessels: MV Constellation, MV River Dream, MV Sidney, MV Peam Siam, MV Zabel, MV Sea Boss, MV Lady Grete, MV NYK Castor, MV Cornelis and MV Lake Arafura.

She added that the Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (Polos) in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, as well as the 24-hour Owwa OpCenter in Pasay City were doing all they could to assist affected Filipino workers and their families, by continuously monitoring the situation, and providing updates.

The Owwa OpCenter also opened its doors to relatives of OFWs who are in the tsunami-stricken countries, giving them three minutes of free calls so they could ascertain if their loved ones were safe.

The Polos, in coordination with the Philippine embassies, were pushing onsite efforts to get in touch with, confirm developments, and assist any affected OFWs.

According to figures furnished by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, some 5,300 documented OFWs were deployed to affected Indian Ocean countries from January to July this year, the majority of them in Malaysia (2,745) and the rest in India (179), Maldives (80), Burma (Myanmar) (77), Sri Lanka (183), Thailand (1,091) and Indonesia (1,044).

Medical teams

Defense Secretary Avelino Cruz announced yesterday that the government would send medical teams to tsunami-stricken countries in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand and Indonesia.

The deployment of medical teams was made on orders of President Macapagal-Arroyo following a meeting with the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) yesterday morning. Cruz chairs the NDCC in concurrent capacity.

During the meeting, Cruz emphasized the need to have an effective information campaign on tsunamis and other disasters to minimize damage to lives and property.

"The NDCC will work toward an effective information campaign on the dangers of tsunamis, earthquakes and typhoons to minimize damages to lives and properties in the event of these three major natural disasters," Cruz said in a statement.

The Department of Health was also communicating with the Thai health minister to see what kind of assistance the Philippine government could give.

"We've been asked to prepare medical teams, but there are no details yet. We'll assess their needs and see what we can manage to give," Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit told the INQUIRER in a phone interview yesterday.

Prayers and donations

The Catholic Church yesterday rallied the country's faithful to donate, in cash or in kind, to their Asian neighbors who were affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines and Caritas Manila will be receiving donations from individuals and parishes starting today.

"Although we have been badly hit by recent calamities, we Filipinos can still share something. For this reason, I appeal to all Filipinos to offer financial help," CBCP president Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla said in a message yesterday.

Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales also urged all parishes in Manila, the Philippines' biggest cluster of dioceses, to set aside a portion of the Sunday collections for victims of the tsunami.

"Tragedy and human suffering transcend many barriers. All of a sudden, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Maldives have become special neighbors to us. These people now reach out to us in the manner that our own sufferings have in the past," Rosales said in his message yesterday.

Bacolod Bishop Vicente Navarra called for prayers for those still missing, those injured, and those struggling to survive after losing their homes in the largest earthquake to hit the world in 40 years.

"I appeal for prayers for the repose of the souls of those who perished and their bereaved families," he said.

The catastrophe, he added, should also be a reminder for everyone to seriously do something to take care of the environment and ecology.

Caloocan Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez said the tsunami that hit six countries in Asia was a wake-up call for the Philippine government to ensure that its weather bureau was well-equipped to monitor possible calamities.

Donations for the victims of the tsunami can be coursed through Caritas Manila at 527-4146, 527-4148, 527-4163 or through the CBCP's National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) accounts with Citibank at Paseo de Roxas, Makati City. For peso donations, the account number is 8-133-000-980. For dollar donations, the account number is 8-142-002-559. Both are under the account name CBCP-NASSA.

Capalla said donations from Philippine churches would be handed over to the Caritas offices in the affected countries. *With a report from Carla P. Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau*

PNP: This time we'll be stricter on firecrackers

From page A1

would patrol the streets for people in possession of the prohibited stuff.

In the bad old days, authorities were ostensibly lax in implementing the law, especially in congested communities where streets were often closed by revelers setting off firecrackers.

Not anymore, said Aglipay. Violators of Republic Act No. 7183 will be slapped with criminal charges that can cost them between P20,000 and P30,000 and land them in jail for a period of six months to one year, he said.

AGLIPAY

Banned pyrotechnics are those that contain more than 0.2 grams of explosive ingredients, ignite before three seconds or after six counts, and carry no manufacturers' label.

The PNP list of banned firecrackers includes "big triangle, super *lolo*, *lolo* thunder, mother rockets, five-star, OG, *pla-pla*, pillbox, whistle bomb and giant whistle bomb, atomic bomb and super *bawang*."

Senior Supt. Arturo Cacdac, chief of the PNP Firearms and Explosives Division, urged the public to settle for relatively harmless pyrotechnics such as "baby rocket, small triangle, Judas' belt, sparklers, fountains and roman candles."

As for policemen, firemen and jail personnel caught firing their guns during the New Year's Eve celebration, Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes wants it known that they will be charged and fired.

Reyes said the coming of the New Year could be observed without firing guns, "so let us avoid things that will harm us in the process."

He directed the PNP to arrest and charge civilians firing their guns during the revelry and called on the public as well to report such incidents through Call/Text 117.

Reyes also directed local government executives to designate a zone where the public could safely set off firecrackers.

He said the designation of such zones in every province, city, municipality and barangay would not only help make the New Year's Eve festivities safer for the people but also prevent the occurrence of fire.

DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2002-188, dated Nov. 8, 2002, mandates all provincial governors, city and municipal mayors, barangay captains and their respective councils to establish their respective "firecracker and pyrotechnic zones" through executive orders and ordinances.

The circular was issued to strictly implement RA 7183. *With a report from Nelson F. Flores*

Most Pinoys enter New Year with hope

From page A1

spondents nationwide and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

The survey found the proportion of people hopeful about the New Year at 87 percent in Mindanao, 81 percent in the Visayas, 78 percent in the rest of Luzon and 77 percent in Metro Manila.

The decline in the proportion of people hopeful about the New Year was somewhat larger in the rest of Luzon, by 11 points, and in the Visayas, by 10 points, and somewhat smaller in Metro Manila, by 8 points, and in Mindanao, by 5 points.

Middle and upper classes

Among the middle-to-upper Classes ABC, hope for the New Year is a high 90 percent compared with 79 percent in Class D and 81 percent in the very poor Class E.

Compared with last year, the proportion dropped by 10 percentage points among those in Class E and by 9 percent among those in Class D, but only by 2 percent among those in Classes ABC.

As usual, the SWS survey found happiness with Christmas linked to hopefulness about the New Year.

Of the majority 64 percent who looked forward to a happy Christmas, nine out of ten looked forward to the coming year 2005 with hope.

However, of the 26 percent who expected a Christmas neither happy nor sad, only two-thirds were hopeful about the New Year.

Quality of life

Of the 10 percent who expected a sad Christmas, only half were hopeful about 2005, or much less than a year ago when four-fifths of those expecting a sad 2003 Christmas were hopeful about the coming year 2004, according to SWS.

Hopefulness about the new year 2005 is 88 percent among "gainers," or those who said their quality of life improved over the last 12 months, but only 77 percent among "losers," or those who said their quality of life got worse over the last 12 months.

Similarly, hope about the New Year is 89 percent among "optimists" or those saying their quality of life will improve in the next 12 months, but only 71 percent among "pessimists" or those saying their quality of life will deteriorate in the next 12 months.

The survey question on hope and fear about the New Year was patterned after polls conducted annually by the Allensbach Institute of Demoskopy, a pioneering opinion research center in Germany. Since 1991, Germans' hope in the coming year has not exceeded 58 percent.

North Pole is melting; Santa may move south

From page A1

for the workshop is melting," Stefan Norris, of the WWF environmental group's Arctic Programme, said on Wednesday.

An eight-nation report by 250 scientists last month predicted the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free in summer by 2100 because of a buildup of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere, mainly from burning fossil fuels in cars or factories.

"Santa may have to move from the North Pole within our children's lifetimes," Norris said. Young people learn that Father Christmas' workshop produces millions of gifts delivered by Santa on a flying, reindeer-drawn sleigh.

Hollywood movies like Warner Bros.' "The Polar Express" bolster belief that Father Christmas lives at the North Pole even though Nordic nations Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Iceland all argue they are his home.

Superman also has an icy retreat, the "Fortress of Solitude," near the North Pole that could be under threat in a warmer world.

A Danish official suggested rescuing Santa by building a giant floating ice rink for the workshop if the Pole thaws.

"Why don't we build some electrical facilities to ensure the ice stays on the North Pole for him?" said Alan Boldt, spokesman of the Danish Ministry of Science. "This should be a subject for the United Nations."

He said Danish group Vestas could build windmills to provide Santa with power.

Copenhagen says Santa's real home is Greenland but reckons that a Danish territorial claim to the North Pole in October clinches its case. Sovereignty over the Pole could let Denmark search for oil and gas as the ice recedes.

"Doesn't he already speak Danish?" Boldt said frostily when asked if Father Christmas would be forced to learn Danish if Denmark won international recognition of its claim to the Pole.

Last month's Arctic report said the region was warming twice as fast as the rest of the globe, partly because dark ground or water, once uncovered, soaks up more heat than ice or snow.

Finland has had most success from Santa, with about 500,000 visitors a year to its Christmas center in Rovaniemi in Lapland.

"Maybe Santa's already moved to Rovaniemi," Norris said. *Reuters*

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The WORLD

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

Bin Laden urges Iraqis to shun polls, names Zarqawi as deputy

ابو مصعب الزرقاوى

US-MADE poster of al-Zarqawi, Iraq's most-wanted man. AFP

DUBAI—An audio tape purportedly from al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden aired on Monday urging Iraqis to boycott January parliamentary polls and saying anyone who takes part would be an "infidel."

The speaker on the tape, excerpts of which were broadcast by Arabic television channel Al Jazeera, also praised bloody attacks by al-Qaida ally Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on US troops and government officials in Iraq, hailing the Jordanian militant as a true "soldier of God" and al-Qaida's leader in Iraq.

Al Jazeera said the speaker repeated a call from an earlier tape purportedly by Bin Laden for attacks on oil installations.

Another part of the tape called on Muslims to boycott elections such as the Palestinian presidential polls next month, it said.

"The constitution imposed by the American occupier (Paul) Bremer is blasphemous... and anyone who takes part in this election consciously and willingly is an infidel," said the speaker, who sounded similar to previous Bin Laden recordings.

"You have to be careful of those charlatans who, under the guise of Islamic parties, urge the people to take part in the election," he added.

Iraq is due to hold parliamentary elections on Jan. 30 which Shiite Muslim groups are poised to win. Bremer was the former US administrator in Iraq.

On Monday, the Iraqi Islamic Party said it was withdrawing from the poll because violence in Sunni areas meant it would not be fair to the minority which dominated the country under ousted President Saddam Hussein.

Though many Sunnis want to vote, many are afraid to and the party's decision revives debate on how Washington and its Iraqi allies can rescue the sectarian balance, and legitimacy, of the resulting assembly if Sunni Arabs stay at home on polling day.

US and Iraqi officials have warned of an increase in violence in the run-up to the election, which will see the creation of a 275-seat national assembly and a new government.

The recording—which was not dated—followed an earlier audio tape purportedly from Bin Laden in which he hailed an attack in Saudi Arabia this month, suggesting the al-Qaida leader is still alive. *Reuters*

Breakthrough not expected in South Asia peace talks

ISLAMABAD—Top diplomats from Pakistan and India met on Tuesday for talks on disputed Kashmir but no breakthrough was expected on the issue, which lies at the heart of a rivalry between the nuclear-armed nations.

The South Asian neighbors have come a long way in patching up ties since going to the brink of a fourth war in 2002, but after nearly a year of talks that have largely skirted the divided Himalayan territory of Kashmir, they face problems taking the peace process forward.

In the first of two days of talks in Islamabad on Monday, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar and his Indian counterpart Shyam Saran exchanged proposals on ways to build confidence about their nuclear and conventional arsenals. But they failed to finalize any deal.

The officials were to discuss Kashmir on Tuesday, but India ruled out any quick breakthrough in that dispute, the cause of two of the countries' three wars since independence in 1947.

"If you are looking at a solution that is visible on the horizon, that is not the case at this point in time," Saran told a news briefing after the first round of talks on Monday.

"Given the complexity of the situation, it is difficult to just sit down and find a solution over the next couple of days."

The Islamabad meeting is supposed to come up with a calendar for talks to advance the peace process forward next year, but Pakistan has become increasingly frustrated over India's unwillingness to change its position over Kashmir.

Islamabad wants progress on Kashmir in tandem with other bilateral issues and has suggested demilitarizing Kashmir while a compromise is sought over its status. It says this could include joint control, some form of UN control, or independence.

But India rejects any redrawing of its borders or further division of Kashmir.

"There has been swift movement in the area of confidence building, (but) you do not have results in the area of resolution of Jammu and Kashmir according to expectations," Pakistan's foreign ministry spokesperson, Masood Khan, said of this year's talks. *Reuters*

Volcker: Saddam wealth mostly from oil smuggling

UNITED NATIONS—The head of an independent investigation into alleged corruption in the UN oil-for-food program said most of the money illegally obtained by Saddam Hussein came from smuggling, much of which the UN Security Council knew about but didn't stop.

In an interview being aired Tuesday on Alhurra, the US government-backed television station tailored for Arab audiences, Paul Volcker questioned the reliability of reports that Saddam diverted amounts ranging from $1.7 billion to $21 billion from the $60 billion oil-for-food program.

The former US Federal Reserve chair said there was a lot of confusion made between money Saddam earned from smuggling and money obtained illegally under the oil-for-food program. He refused to give any estimates, saying his investigation is still under way.

"The big figures that you see in the press, which are sometimes labeled oil-for-food—the big figures are smuggling, which took place before the oil-for-food program started and it continued while the oil-for-food program was in place," he said, according to a transcript obtained Monday by The Associated Press.

The Security Council authorized the oil-for-food program to help Iraqis cope with UN sanctions imposed after Saddam's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Launched in December 1996, it allowed the former Iraqi regime to sell oil provided the money went primarily to buy humanitarian goods and pay reparations to victims of the 1991 Gulf War.

Saddam's government decided on the goods it wanted, who should provide them, and who could buy Iraqi oil—but the Security Council committee overseeing sanctions monitored the contracts.

In a report in October, top US weapons investigator Charles Duelfer said Saddam was able to "subvert" the oil-for-food program to generate an estimated $1.7 billion in revenue outside UN control from 1997-2003. In addition, Iraq brought in over $8 billion in illicit oil deals with Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Egypt through smuggling or illegal pumping from 1991-2003 when sanctions were in place, he said.

US congressional investigators reported in November that Saddam made more than $21.3 billion in illegal revenue—over $13 billion from smuggling and about $7 billion by subverting the oil-for-food program.

"Without question, (there were) problems in the oil-for-food area," Volcker said. "But when you look at those $10 billion figures, or $20 billion figures, most of those numbers are so-called smuggling, much of which was known and taken note of by the Security Council, but not stopped." *AP*

QUAKE MEASURER

US seismologist Charles F. Richter (1900-1985) standing over the seismograph he invented with Beno Gutenberg to measure seismographic activity, known as the Richter scale in this 1964 photo. Unlike previous scales which recorded the damage caused by earthquakes, the Richter scale measures the magnitude of the quake. The quake which took place off the coast of Sumatra Dec. 27 measured 9.0 on the open-ended scale, the largest recorded in more than 40 years. AFP

China faces severe water lack yearly

BEIJING—China faces water shortage of 40 billion cubic meters every year with severe water pollution posing a threat to the health of millions of people, state media reported Tuesday.

More than 400 of 669 Chinese cities are facing water shortages, among which the situation in 110 cities was described as "serious," said Xinhua news agency, quoting Wang Shucheng, minister of water resources.

Some 20 million hectares of farmland were affected by drought, reducing grain production by 28 million tons, Wang told the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Severe water pollution in China made water shortages even worse and threatened the safety of drinking water.

"China's water pollution is very serious," Wang said, adding that just 38.1 percent of China's river water was drinkable.

China pumped out 68 billion tons of sewage in 2003, double the amount in 1980, Xinhua said.

In some regions, high levels of metal and organic pollutants caused cancer and deformity in humans, Wang was quoted as saying.

According to an earlier Xinhua report last week, more than 70 percent of China's rivers and lakes were polluted to different degrees.

"Currently, 300 million Chinese people are drinking unsafe water," Wang said in the report. *AFP*

Israel frees 159 Palestinians; Abbas wants thousands more out

RAMALLAH, West Bank—Israel freed 159 Palestinian prisoners on Monday as a gesture to Egypt and moderate new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, but he called for a "serious release" of thousands of security detainees.

Abbas, trying to persuade Palestinian militants to stop fighting to help revive talks on Palestinian statehood with Israel, has made prisoner releases part of his campaign for a Jan. 9 presidential election to elect a successor to Yasser Arafat who died in November.

Detainees freed to tearful reunions with relatives kissed the ground and flashed V-for-victory signs. Cars honked horns and carried some prisoners around in a celebratory procession.

Palestinian leaders welcomed the release of 113 men jailed for security offenses and 46 for illegally entering Israel, but said the move fell far short of their demands.

Most Palestinians regard jailed compatriots as heroes of their struggle for independence, and a broader prisoner release could strengthen Abbas's hand to rein in militants who reject a ceasefire, with some sworn to destroying Israel.

Many of those freed were nearing the end of their sentences and had been jailed for membership in militant groups. Few had taken part in armed attacks on Israelis.

"I respect the release of every prisoner, but we need a serious release process," Abbas told reporters in Ramallah.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie called for all "political prisoners" to be freed.

More than 7,000 Palestinians—from teenagers up to the former mainstream Fatah movement leader in the West Bank, Marwan Barghouthi—are imprisoned in Israel, their numbers swollen since a revolt broke out in occupied territories four years ago.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had promised the release to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt after it freed an alleged Israeli spy jailed in 1997. Mubarak, a key regional mediator, had also sought Israeli signals of goodwill to bolster Abbas.

"We look forward to renewing a dialogue with our Palestinian neighbors, and in this framework there is the possibility of further prisoner releases if of course Palestinians work to meet their commitment to stop terrorism and engage in reforms," Israeli government spokesperson Avi Pazner told Reuters.

Many of the 7,000 in jail are being held for involvement in suicide bombings and ambush attacks or suspected support roles.

Some have been detained indefinitely without trial.

Israel has vowed not to free prisoners with "blood on their hands"—those jailed, according to Israel, for planning or carrying out attacks that have killed Israelis. *Reuters*

Young teachers make a difference in tough US schools

By Alan Elsner

WASHINGTON—As a student at New York University, Ruth Zemel dreamed of finding a job that would enable her to change the world.

Three years later, she stands in front of a class of high school students in one of Washington's most underprivileged neighborhoods, teaching them mathematics.

"I have homeless students, students who have been abused, students who need to take time off to translate for their parents, students who work 40 hours a week on top of school to help support their families," Zemel said.

Zemel is one of 3,000 teachers recruited under the Teach for America program working in some of the country's poorest and toughest urban and rural schools this year.

The private non-profit program seeks to mobilize talented and idealistic young people for two-year teaching stints, but more than 60 percent choose to stay in education after their commitment is done.

"We've found it is possible to go into a school and create a learning culture in the classroom and it is within a teacher's power to foster success," said Wendy Kopp, who came up for the idea of Teach for America when she herself was an undergraduate at Princeton University in 1989.

The program has proved highly popular; only 14 percent of the 13,500 applicants last year were accepted. The program is expanding to 3,800 teachers next year.

At Bell Multicultural Senior High School where Zemel is teaching, almost two-thirds of the students are Hispanic and another 25 percent are black.

Assistant principals Darry Strickland and Dahlia Aguilar both started as Teach for America corps members and continued in education.

"Part of my passion now comes from when I saw what was happening to black and brown kids, kids who are poor and those for whom English is a second language," said Strickland. "I fell in love with youth—with my ghetto kids."

Racial disparities have long been one of the biggest problems facing the US education system. By the fourth grade, students in low-income areas are already three years behind their peers in reading and mathematics.

A new book by Harvard University education and social policy professor Gary Orfield finds that only half of minority students in the United States graduate from high school, a figure that is often disguised in official statistics. Among males, the figure is even lower.

Orfield said many urban high schools had become "dropout factories" with devastating effects on both students and their communities.

Zemel said among her students truancy was a constant problem. "I do everything in my power to get them here. I always try to convey to my students how important it is for them to be here every day," she said.

She raised money from a private donor to pay 10 students $8 an hour to tutor fellow students after school hours and has organized a college trip for nine outstanding students to tour campuses in New York.

"We do activities showing how much more money people make if they have gone to college. These kids have the same talent as more privileged ones, but their skills are lower than they should be," Zemel said.

Despite their youth and lack of experience, Teach for America members produce higher test scores among their students than other teachers in the same schools, according to an independent study released last June.

As for Zemel, she is staying at Bell for a third year. "It's a surprise to me. I didn't intend to stay in education but now I'm here, I can't see how I can leave," she said. *Reuters*

Yushchenko poll victory a watershed for Ukraine

YOUNG supporter of Yushchenko smiles during a massive rally in Kiev's Independence Square Dec. 27 to celebrate the opposition's apparent victory. AP

KIEV—The election of a Western-leaning reformer to Ukraine's presidency marks a watershed for the strategically important nation, much of whose population yearns to shed the historic influence of Russia and open toward the West.

"European integration is a strategic interest for Ukraine," opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko said repeatedly on the stump in this nation that hugs a sizable portion of Russia's western border.

Phrases like that can cause quite a stir in Ukraine, where Russia as a state was born more than 1,000 years ago and where in some parts in the country in the words of one analyst, "the majority of people effectively aren't even citizens of Ukraine, they look to Russia."

Ballot counts showed Yushchenko decisively winning Sunday's rerun presidential vote by more than two million votes, although his pro-Russia opponent Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich vowed to appeal the results to the supreme court.

But it was not just the fact that Yushchenko won the presidency of a country that has always been under Russia's sway, it was the way he did it.

The 50-year-old opposition leader helped set in motion mass "orange revolution" protests that galvanized a huge section of Ukraine's population, exposed deep rifts between its two very different halves, and drastically changed the way the country was run.

"The orange revolution is the beginning of a revolution in Ukraine's national identity," said analyst Vadim Karasev.

Events in Ukraine were "the final act of the Soviet Union's collapse... and have turned the page on its shadow existence," parliament speaker Volodymyr Litvin said last week.

"For 14 years we have been independent, but now we are free," Yushchenko said after polls closed on Sunday and early results showed him leading the vote count. "A new political era has begun in Ukraine."

This upheaval in the former Soviet republic's national identity began in Nov. 21, when Yushchenko refused to concede a runoff election that handed victory to the ruling regime candidate Yanukovich by about one million votes.

Yushchenko claimed the authorities were trying to steal the vote for their man, and his call to supporters to come out in the streets was unexpectedly answered by hundreds of thousands of people tired of the regime of outgoing leader Leonid Kuchma that critics charged was riddled with corruption.

Much of Yushchenko's support came from western Ukraine, a Ukrainian-speaking region with a history of nationalism, where most people are Catholic Uniates and as children heard heroic tales of partisans resisting the Soviet Union well into the 1950s. *AFP*

US launches probe of Christmas travel fiasco

WASHINGTON—The US government has launched a full-fledged investigation of what it called severe disruptions in Christmas air travel that resulted in at least 30,000 passengers being stranded in airports around the country.

Adding to the overall sense of chaos were nearly 10,000 pieces of undelivered luggage piled up on Christmas Day in Philadelphia because baggage handlers of cash-strapped US Airways called in sick in droves.

On Monday, Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta declared himself "deeply concerned" and ordered his department's inspector general to join forces with other units to conduct a thorough investigation.

"It is important that the department and the traveling public understand what happened, why it happened, and whether the carriers properly planned for the holiday travel period and responded appropriately to consumer needs in the aftermath," Mineta said in a memorandum to Kenneth Mead.

Aside from US Airways, the probe will target Comair, a regional subsidiary of Delta Air Lines, whose computer breakdown plunged the system into disarray.

Unable to properly schedule its flight crews, the carrier was forced to cancel as many as 1,100 flights on Saturday, leaving thousands of restless passengers, anxious to join their families for the holiday, stranded, sometimes sleeping on the floor in as many as 119 airports. *AFP*

CIA jet whisks terror suspects to torturing countries—Post

WASHINGTON—A US jet registered to a ghost company whisks terror suspects to countries that use torture, The Washington Post reported Monday, based on its own investigation.

The Gulfstream V turbojet has been seen at US military bases around the world, often loading up hooded and shackled suspects and delivering them to countries known to use torture, a process the CIA calls "rendition," the Washington daily said.

The Post investigated the ownership of the jet, which has been spotted in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan and which carries the tail number N379P, according to the newspaper.

The officers of the plane's corporate owner, Premier Executive Transport Services, are all listed with dates of birth in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, but with social security numbers issued since 1998, found the Post, which was unable to locate any further business or credit information on them or on the company.

The CIA refused comment, but such "proprietary" or front corporations are standard procedure for the agency, former operatives told the Post.

The "rendering" of suspects to countries that employ interrogation techniques banned in the United States is worrisome and could violate the UN Convention on Torture, World Organization for Human Rights USA executive director Morton Sklar told the daily.

The Post article confirmed much of a Nov. 14 article published in the Sunday Times, of London, which obtained flight plans for the plane, which, the Times said, always departs from Washington, DC and has visited the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where about 550 terror suspects are held.

A Swedish television program, "Cold Facts," reported that in December 2001, the jet took hooded terror suspects to Egypt, according to the Post, which confirmed the Swedish report independently.

The Post said the plane, with hooded crew members speaking with US accents, loaded two Egyptian nationals and took off at 4:30 a.m. for Cairo.

It said airport officials and amateur plane spotters, some using binoculars, have logged multiple sightings of N379P at several US military airports and fueling stations. *AFP*

Disaster in Aceh offers new hope for peace

JAKARTA—The death and destruction wrought by quakes and tidal waves in Indonesia's Aceh region may offer one shred of hope—a chance for peace in an area ravaged by decades of separatist conflict.

Successive Indonesian governments have failed to resolve the dispute over the resource-rich but poor province on the northern tip of Sumatra island, with the last truce with the rebel Free Aceh Movement breaking down last year.

The situation plummeted to a low in May 2003, when Indonesia's military launched a major operation, placing the province under martial law and opening a new chapter of bloodshed in a conflict that has claimed thousands of lives.

With neither side able to claim any decisive advantage in the struggle, Aceh looked set to continue on a miserable path of violent attrition, even as the new government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono pledged peace.

But when a huge earthquake on Sunday unleashed a barrage of destruction on the fragile communities of Aceh's coast, killing thousands of people in the space of a few hours, the province's fortunes may have been changed completely.

A day after the quake, as the true extent of the carnage emerged, Indonesia's military chief General Endriartono Sutarto took the unprecedented step of calling for a temporary ceasefire to help aid efforts.

According to the Jakarta Post daily, the rebel's central command in Sweden has issued orders to its armed units to cease hostilities and focus on relief efforts.

Former Indonesian human rights minister Hasballah Saad said the tragedy provided Yudhoyono with an opportunity to capitalize on solidarity forged between opposing camps as they tried to cope with the catastrophe.

"This disaster actually provides a momentum that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono should seize to end years of distrust and bitterness," said Saad.

He said the president had already taken steps in the right direction by declaring the situation in Aceh a national disaster. *AFP*

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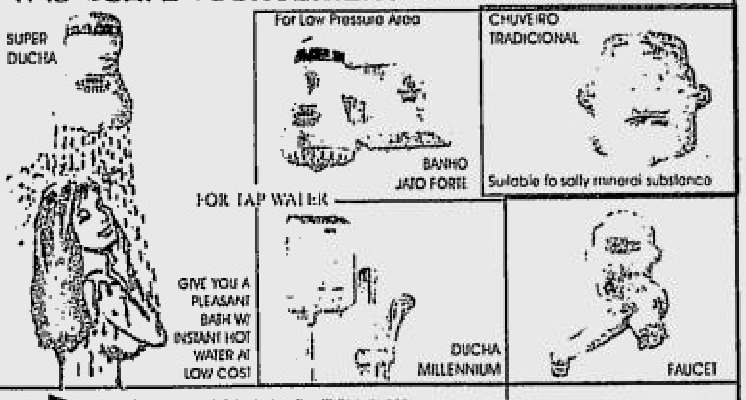

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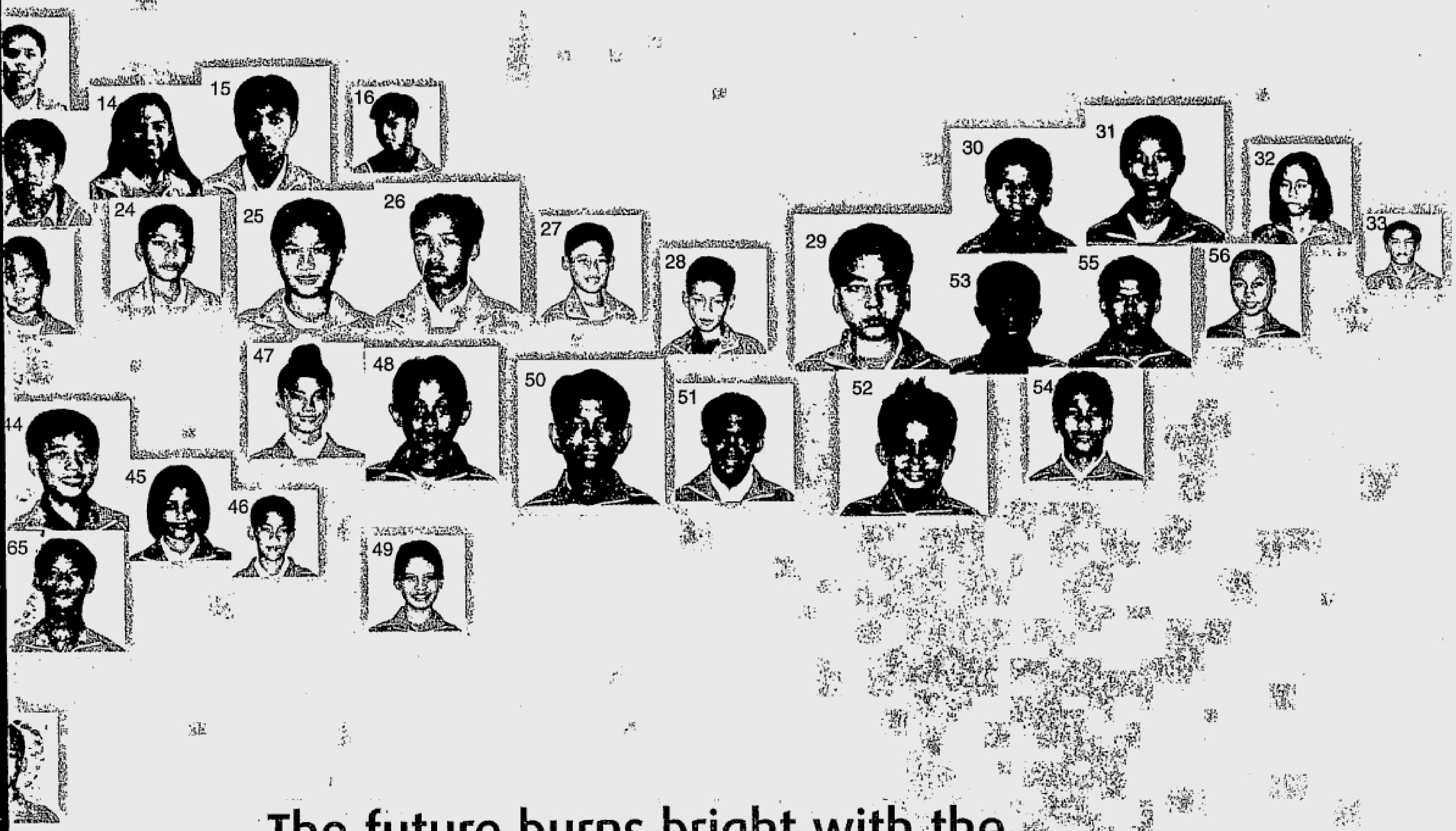
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•P.O. Box 2353 Makati Central Post Office 1263 Makati City
•Our telephone numbers are 897-8808 connecting all departments
•Editorial Fax 897-4793 / 897-4794 •Advertising 897-4807
•Circulation 527-3342 / 527-3348 / 528-0183 / 528-0186 and 528-0213 / Fax: 528-02-34.

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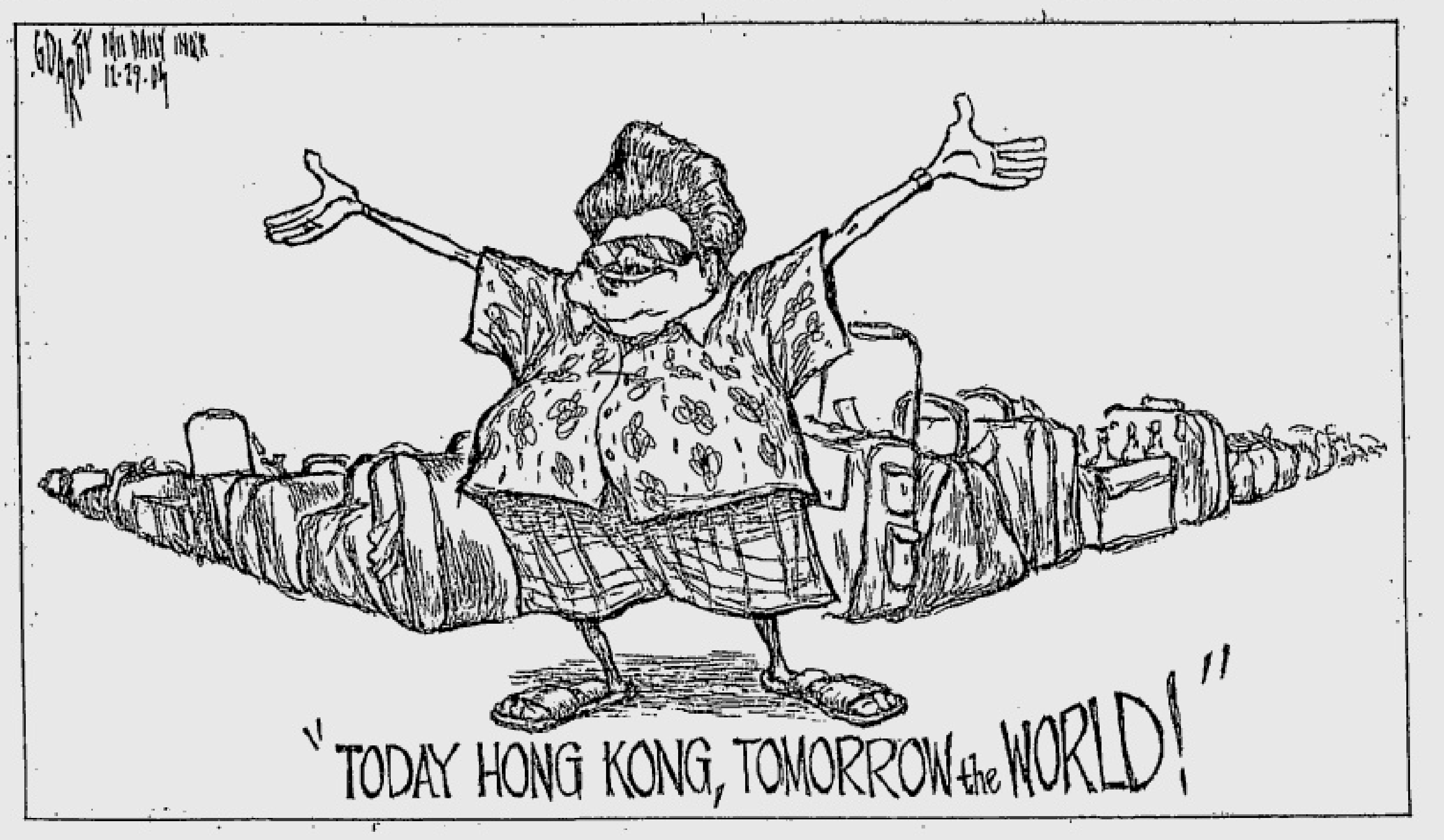
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Act of God

EDITORIAL

JUST when the world thought that it had seen the worst of a year of disasters, the worst catastrophe in living memory struck 10 countries, mostly in South Asia, last Sunday, dwarfing everything that came before it in terms of death and destruction. An earthquake of magnitude 9 near Sumatra left at least 5,000 people dead in Indonesia, most of them in the state capital of Banda Aceh. Worse was to follow in a matter of a few hours as tsunamis unleashed by the powerful earthquake raced across the Indian Ocean and then crashed on coastal villages and towns as well as some of the more popular island resorts in the region, leaving a wide arc of devastation extending from Indonesia and Thailand to India and Sri Lanka all the way to Somalia in Africa.

As of mid-day yesterday, international relief agencies placed the number of dead at about 25,000, almost half of them in Sri Lanka. But the count could double as relief workers reach remote villages which have had no contact with population centers since Sunday. One Thai official said the final death toll in his country could be more than twice the 990 confirmed deaths as of yesterday. Indonesian Vice President Yusuf Kalla said between 21,000 and 25,000 Indonesians could have been killed.

But whatever the final count may be, it is already clear that what happened was an international catastrophe of almost unimaginable proportions. Geologists have to reach as far back as 1883 to find a tsunami of comparable violence and destructiveness. That was when the volcano Krakatoa, located on the opposite side of Sumatra, exploded and caused the deadliest tsunami on record, killing an estimated 36,000 people.

What makes this horrendous tragedy doubly sad and frustrating is that it was purely nature's handiwork, an act of God. Unlike the landslides and floods that claimed 1,800 lives in Quezon and Aurora early this month, for example, nature didn't get any help from loggers and others who abuse it to wreak havoc on hundreds of villages and towns. There are no engineers to blame for poor design and construction, no government planners to call to account for allowing communities to rise in places that are risky. Unlike storms or earthquakes, human knowledge and science seem completely helpless in mitigating the destructive capacity of a tsunami.

Scientists are now saying the death toll in the Dec. 26 disaster could have been much less had India and Sri Lanka been part of an international tsunami warning system, covering countries in the Pacific Rim. But that seems like a desperate effort to assign human responsibility for the devastation caused by a natural phenomenon. By all accounts, the tsunami hit Thailand within an hour and then struck Sri Lanka and India not more than two hours later. How does one move people numbering tens of thousands in that brief span of time? How helpful is a warning that gives people an hour or two to move to safer ground? In Sri Lanka, thieves sent people running away for their lives by claiming huge waves were being seen again and then looting the abandoned homes. How does one keep such soulless creatures from doing the same thing every time an earthquake strikes?

To most Filipinos, the relevant question is, are we really part of the Pacific warning system? Until this South Asian catastrophe, few Filipinos seem to have heard about a tsunami warning system. Fewer still know what one is supposed to do when he hears such a warning. If a tsunami were to strike any part of the country today, the warning system might as well not be there at all, given our people's state of awareness about such matters. The government should move quickly to correct this deficiency.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has called on Filipinos to offer prayers for the victims of the tragedy and promised to send a small contingent to help in the rescue and relief efforts in the countries hit by the catastrophe. Given our limited resources, the help we can extend to them can be little more than token. But there can be no doubting the depth and sincerity of our sympathy for the victims, considering the recent calamity that visited parts of the country. Still, the best way to help our suffering neighbors may be to help our own people in Quezon and Aurora survive and rebuild their lives. This will free international relief and aid organizations to concentrate their efforts on what has been described by a United Nations official as an unprecedented catastrophe requiring "unprecedented generosity" from those who have been spared from it.

Dogs are terrified by firecracker blasts

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

DAY after tomorrow is New Year's Eve, during which, following tradition, revelers will explode firecrackers—their fingers and hands along with them sometimes. The emergency rooms of hospitals will be like a war zone, with maimed patients crying out in pain as overworked doctors and nurses labor to stitch fingers and hands back together again. The same firecrackers will start a few fires and raze homes and, if we're unlucky, perhaps, blow up a firecracker factory or two, killing some of its workers.

It happens every year despite repeated warnings against the danger of firecrackers, but it seems people, otherwise sensible during other times of the year, lose their common sense on New Year's Eve. And so, some of them welcome the new year minus a finger, a hand, or an eye. Inevitably, his New Year's resolution will be to never light a firecracker again—too late, with a finger or hand or eye already gone for good.

Then there are the showoffs who fire their guns into the air just to show their neighbors that they have guns—a warning not to mess with them. As the poem says, when you fire an arrow into the air, it falls to earth you know not where. Without your knowing it, that bullet you fired into the air could fall on a human being and kill him. How would you like that?

If somebody gets hit by a wayward bullet, you think it is virtually impossible to determine where that bullet came from? Guess again.

There are now ways to find out what gun fired the bullet and where it was fired. A few New Year's Eve guntoters—who fired into the air, killing innocent persons—are already serving time in jail. Don't join them. The prisons are already crowded as they are.

Bang pots and pans and cans instead. Or buy paper horns. Or watch your neighbors explode their own firecrackers and make fools of themselves. The noise will be the same. Watch them explode their money. It's much cheaper that way.

Or you can go to Makati or the Baywalk on Roxas Boulevard and watch the fireworks displays there for free. Think of all the money you will save by not spending for fireworks that you will be able watch anyway for free. That should make your New Year even happier.

* * *

In the merrymaking on New Year's Eve, we humans forget our non-human companions—our pets. Animals have much more sensitive hearings than us. Dogs and cats have 10 times more hearing power than us.

Firecracker explosions that are ordinary to us are therefore terrifying to them.

Many dogs of uncaring owners are traumatized by all the explosions on New Year's Eve. War dogs are first trained by acclimatizing them to the explosions of battle before taking them to the front lines. Pet dogs don't have such training. They will be terrified on New Year's Eve. So *maawa naman kayo*.

Put wads of cotton in their ears to at least deaden the sounds of firecrackers, but don't forget to take them off after the revelry. If possible, take them inside the house, or in any small room where they will feel safe and secure. Have somebody stay with them and pat them and stroke them to reassure them during the merrymaking. You won't regret it.

We have a young dog, adopted as a puppy when it was abandoned to die inside a plastic bag thrown into a ditch. This will be its first New Year's Eve. When there were loud firecracker explosions in the neighborhood one day last week, it began running here and there, trying to hide under the cars or go into the house. I called it and patted it and stroked its back. It was trembling.

So I took it into my little library and talked to it soothingly, patting it all the while. We stayed there until the explosions died down and it was reassured. I plan to do the same thing on New Year's Eve.

Years ago, we had another young dog, also adopted, given by its original owner who did not want it anymore. On New Year's Eve, we had unthinkingly left it outside in the yard. The next morning it was gone. It must have squeezed between the bars of the steel cage in terror during the midnight explosions. It was gone for many months. We looked for it everywhere. We thought it might have gone back to its original home but it wasn't there. We thought it was gone for good.

Then one day while driving home, we caught sight of it in a cogon-choked vacant lot in the subdivision. My daughter got down and called it but it ran into the tall grass. The owner of the adjoining house said he had been feeding it but that it would always go back into the grass after eating.

So we went home to get some food, returned and put it on an open space near the fence, and then sat back in the car to wait. After a while, it timidly crept out and nibbled at the food. My daughter talked to it soothingly, approaching with outstretched hand. The dog must have recognized her; it sniffed and then licked her fingers. She was able to embrace it and we took it home. That was many years ago. That dog is now the oldest in our menagerie.

You think dogs get used to firecracker explosions after a while? They usually don't. A year or two after we got that dog back, we celebrated New Year's Eve away from home, leaving our dogs behind.

When we returned, that same dog was gone again. It was gone for weeks—though we looked high and low for it—until one day we saw it back in the yard romping with the other dogs.

Silence

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

(I wrote this in Italy a couple of months ago during a media conference. I'm sharing it with readers after getting a lot of pressure from friends to do so. It seems to have gotten rave reviews. It was one of those things that came easy, I wrote it fast with a lot of collateral sounds around me. If you're pious, you'll probably attribute it to tongues of fire. If you're not, like me, you'll attribute it to a desperate need to express things after not being able to do so for more than a week. Whatever. It's much shorter than the original. It's as good a way as any of saying Happy New Year.)

THE FIRST time I heard about this conference from my friend Billy Esposo, who invited me to it, I was intrigued by its title: Silence, Word and Light. I have been to many media conferences, not least in Europe, and I have heard the words "word" and "light" plentifully. I do not recall hearing the word "silence" in connection with them, It is a curious word, which at first glance does not seem to belong to the basket called communications. Yet over the last couple of days, I have learned to appreciate its significance. I have heard the speakers talk about the power of the word and the power of the light, but the one thing I have been impressed with is the power of silence.

Silence in connection with sound, or with word, is often used only by way of contrast. As in the "word welling out of silence" or "light breaking out of darkness." I am glad therefore that one of the speakers brought out the many dimensions or dialectics about silence and sound, light and darkness. From which one may draw the conclusion that silence, and indeed, darkness are not just the reverse or negative sides of sound and light but that they have a meaning or weight all their own.

My own appreciation of this comes neither from classical Western philosophy nor from Christian thought but from a Zen teaching. That teaching says that a window is nothing but empty space. You may put all sorts of frames to adorn them, but in the end a window is just an empty space. It may be a square, it may be a rectangle, it may be a circle, but it is a square or rectangle or circle of—nothing.

But try living in a house without a window. It is not possible, or at least it is not bearable. Without a window, life is impossible. Without a window, life is unbearable.

This suggests that in some cases, emptiness can be pregnant with fullness. Nothingness can be pregnant with being. Absence can be pregnant with presence.

That is what silence is. It is a window in a house, or human being.

Less poetically or mystically, I have come to appreciate the power of silence from some of the things the speakers have said. They have not always presented it in the way I am presenting it, but I've gleaned it from their talks—like a dog hearing sounds at subhuman decibel levels—or from reading between the lines. I've learned that silence may manifest itself in three aspects.

The first is through listening. That is a monumental insight. It is the easiest thing to talk, it is the hardest thing to listen. You need go no further to find proof of it than that I am talking here. My only excuse is that I am doing so after listening intently to the speakers. Journalists are particularly notorious in talking. You cannot find a gathering of journalists where people are not talking, often all at the same time. It's all you can do to finish a story, or even a sentence, without someone jumping in to say his or her piece. Of course, that is true as well for non-government—or civil society—institutions, but that is another story.

I know of people who teach other people how to talk. I do not know of people who teach other people how to listen.

The willingness to listen is the key to all communication. I do not mean by this the willingness to listen to absolute bores or people who want to talk interminably, which this world is also full of. Even divine patience has its limits, and the patience of journalists is nowhere near to being divine, as well it should be. I mean by this "listening with one's heart," as some have put it. I mean by this an openness to other people's ideas or convictions, particularly those that challenge our own, or indeed that rattle them to their very roots. I mean by it listening to Muslims if you are a Christian, listening to an untouchable if you are touchable, listening to one who does not believe in God if you do.

I find myself appreciating the faculty of silence particularly in a world where information is growing at astonishing levels. The print medium is now hard put to compete with television and radio which are manufacturing news at intervals of every half hour, if not shorter. CNN, Fox News, the BBC, and other media are already doing so. It is not inconceivable that in this age of digital technology, it may soon be producing news at even shorter intervals, or even instantaneously, as soon as they are happening.

But rather that enlightening, this plethora of information is obfuscating. Rather than making sense of the confusing, this is making confusion out of sense. Rather than deepening our understanding of the world, this is giving us blithe, facile and superficial interpretations of the world. If not indeed substituting or superimposing an artificial world on the real or sensate one.

What we get is not the word, what we get is mindless chatter.

If you are a believer, it is enough to convince you that we are witnessing the modern version of the Tower of Babel, where the prideful are condemned to speak in different tongues. If you are a believer, you will probably believe that the cure to this lies in the rediscovery of God. I myself am convinced that the cure to this lies in the discovery of silence.

(To be concluded)

Celebration

COMMENTARY

Alice Ross Morta
Institute on Church and Social Issues

THE ANNUAL Marikina Christmas Festival, which I call the "*tiangge* (or bazaar) of all holiday *tiangges*," never cease to be a crowd-drawer. If not for their colorful lights, the hundreds of stalls covering a significant stretch of the Marikina riverbanks can easily drown in the horde anxious for a steal. Not even typhoon Yoyong, which wiped out the *tiangges* early this month, could stop the festival; the stalls began to mushroom back as soon as the riverbanks had been cleaned up.

Passing by the Marikina bridge two nights ago, I saw how people swarmed the bazaar like bees, and it was a little past one o'clock in the morning. With a plastic or two of goods in their hands, they continued to hop from one stall to another, in search of "signature" bags and wallets, P60-shirts, and toys that were "three-for-P100."

And then there were the upscale consumers at the posh air-conditioned malls. Perfumes (each bottle costing more than twice as much as my lunch for one month) were very much in demand. And so was everything branded and "paper-bagged." I wondered how many cellular phones were purchased with the long-awaited 13-month pay and Christmas bonus.

With all the money circulating in the market this holiday season, it is hard to believe what Pulse Asia said in its Ulat ng Bayan last November—60 percent of Filipinos feel they are worse off now compared to last year.

We are distressed with how getting by becomes tougher each day, what with the little money we have. We budget our meager earnings for food, rent, utilities, transportation, and stick to it as much as we can. But once the breeze turns cold and the radio starts playing "Jingle Bells," signaling the nearness of that one day we call Christmas, we temporarily forget that money doesn't simply fall from the skies for everyone. Looking around and watching all the holiday frills, it's hard to believe that a majority of Filipinos are poor.

For a "poor" people, we surely love extravagance. It is in our culture, perhaps, something that we mastered from being a Spanish colony for more than 300 years. When the Spaniards converted our ancestors into Catholicism, they also arranged plentiful religious events for us to celebrate. Thus were born the fiestas, which have become lavish festivities in honor of patron saints.

It seems to me that all the barangays in our country, including the urbanized ones, have become accustomed to putting up *banderitas* at least once a year during their fiesta which has also become a day of thanksgiving for a good harvest or an excuse for the community to come together.

In fact, every Filipino occasion imaginable has been made a reason to celebrate. I've never attended a wedding in the province, but from the stories I hear, it shouldn't be anything different from our fiestas. A friend jokes that a wedding reception in the barrio momentarily tears down the boundaries between barangays; you won't recognize anymore who is from where. Food is abundant; the extra large pots and pans seem bottomless. Never mind that the family had to borrow money for the occasion, and only God knows how it can manage to pay back the loan. A wedding is a reason to eat, drink and be merry. All important events need to be celebrated.

But there remains one occasion atop all the others. So exceptional is this one that the preparation begins months before and the merriment continues for weeks after. This is Christmas, the day which commemorates the birth of our Savior, the Son of God. As Catholics, we believe that Christmas marks the fulfillment of God's promise and is the ultimate manifestation of His love for humankind. It is a very important occasion and no amount of poverty can stop us from mounting a feast that is the mother of all feasts.

Squeezing my way into the *tiangges* and department stores last week, I realized that I chose the most awful timing to look for a new pair of pants to match my new pair of leather sandals. I was caught in the middle of the Christmas rush. People were frantically searching for gifts to hand out at Christmas parties and family reunions were drawing nearer.

Filipinos definitely take generosity to a whole new level this time of the year. As much as we want the celebration to steer clear of commercialism, we cannot help it. Kriss Kringle, *monito-monita* and gift-giving have become very much a part of Christmas. In fact, we have to admit that for the sake of Christmas, many of us forgo some basic things to give a little something to others. I'm sure that not a few deliberately skipped lunch or walked to work to put aside money for gifts.

But why the trouble? I guess it's because we Filipinos always see ourselves as part of a larger group. It starts with our concept of the family. From the immediate household, it extends to countless nieces and nephews, grandparents, aunts and uncles, including relatives acquired through marriage and other sacraments, like baptism and confirmation. According to a UP professor, the Filipino culture is based on the notion of *kapwa* (shared being), that each of us exists with society. He says that the strongest social urge of the Filipino is to connect to others. This is why everything—material or otherwise—has to be shared. No doubt, sharing is part of the Filipino's vocabulary.

Life in this country may be relatively less easy. But as a friend of mine says, you can never accuse Filipinos of not trying. With or without money, we will try to enjoy the season as best as we can. Because for the Filipinos, there will always be a reason to celebrate.

Lessons from the tsunami

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

A TELL-TALE sign of an oncoming tsunami, experts say, is the sea water receding and exposing the ocean floor. This phenomenon is so unusual that it will usually draw townsfolk to the beach front, and a number might even venture farther out to "harvest" the fish and other marine life stranded on the sandy bottom. Seconds or minutes later, a "wall of water" will come rushing back in, catching the people off-guard. And that is why, authorities on disasters claim, tsunamis kill and maim so many people.

The oncoming waves are also so high and powerful that they will knock down any structures in its path, and flood areas that lie kilometers inland. Amateur video footage of the destruction wrought in Phuket, Thailand, in India and Sri Lanka, showed the floodwaters knocking down huts and buildings, sweeping away cars and buses and carrying off hapless folks.

By far the most chilling news for Filipinos, in the aftermath of what has to be one of the world's biggest natural disasters, is that the Philippines is "prone to tsunamis," as the headline of a front-page story said. In fact, said the report, two temblors, mild and unrelated to the earthquake just off the coast of Sumatra, hit the country just before dawn Sunday. The archipelago is located in the earthquake belt, we are told, and our long coastline (one of the longest in the world) makes us vulnerable to any killer waves created by shifting tectonic plates.

Most recently, 78 people died in a pre-dawn earthquake and tsunami that hit Mindoro in November, 1994. The earthquake was recorded at 7.1 on the Richter scale.

Almost 30 years ago, a magnitude 7.9 (last Sunday's quake was measured at 9) earthquake caused by a shift of the Cotabato trench triggered tsunamis that devastated more than 700 kilometers of coastline, from Cotabato to Pagadian, Zamboanga, Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur and Norte and Sultan Kudarat. Some 4,000 people died as a result of those killer waves.

* * *

I WAS a fresh college graduate at the time of the earthquake-tsunami "double whammy" and writing for Cor Manila, a weekly newspaper published by the Archdiocese of Manila. Because the archdiocese had organized a massive fund-raising and relief drive for the victims in Mindanao, and because, I suspect, the martial law-era media tended to downplay the gravity of the situation, our editor, the late Felix Bautista, sent me, together with Maloy Ramos who took on the role of photographer, to document the efforts of the local churches to meet the needs of the survivors.

There were few visible signs of the devastation by the time we got to Mindanao. Survivors were staying in temporary shelters or else housed in evacuation shelters in public schools and gymnasiums. By then the local authorities, including local church groups, had also managed to get their food distribution networks organized.

Still, I do remember that most of the survivors had a blank, vacant look, and were hard put to dredge up their memories whenever I asked how they managed to stay above the swirling waters and move to higher ground. I also remember attending a meeting of survivors in Pagadian, one of the cities hit hardest by the tsunami, called by community organizers and leaders because rumors had been circulating that the local government was going to use the disaster as an excuse to "reclaim" areas that had been the site of large urban poor communities.

* * *

THOUGH weeks had passed since the earthquake-tsunami, the affected areas still experienced aftershocks. One night in Cotabato, Maloy and I were literally thrown off our beds by a particularly nasty aftershock, and when we told our hosts—a community of nuns—about it, they merely laughed indulgently, having become so used to the temblors they could now sleep through them.

We went through a different sort of "shock" in Zamboanga City. We were on our way to a restaurant for a meal of *curacha*, the coconut crab that at that time could be found only in Zamboanga, with a priest and a nun when, because of the darkness, our driver failed to spot a soldier who was manning a traffic outpost and had signaled us to stop. When our driver sped on, the soldier started yelling and then fired shots in the air and at us. Our vehicle screeched to a halt and we all dove for cover. Minutes later, confronting the soldier and his companions , the nun brought out a whistle that she wore hanging from her neck, reminding him to use it instead of live ammunition the next time a vehicle ignored him. Needless to say, we failed to taste *curacha* that night.

* * *

I HAD almost forgotten about the Mindanao tsunami had it not been for Sunday's events. So I guess it's safe to say that most folks in the affected areas, save for the people who lived through the devastation, have forgotten not just the damage and loss of lives, but also the lessons it taught.

The bit about the receding waters and what they portend should be drilled into the heads of all Filipinos, but particularly residents of coastal areas. Rene Solidum, the new chief of Phivolcs, suggests that local government authorities in coastal villages and towns identify nearby elevated sites which could be reserved as evacuation areas, and map out various routes to them in the event of a tsunami or similar catastrophe. In fact, identifying such sites and keeping these free from development or construction should be done not just to protect residents from tsunamis but in readiness for any sort of disaster, including fires and typhoons.

Given the scope of the devastation that hit South Asia, it may be difficult to glean "lessons" from it, if any. But if it would only remind us of disasters past, and the steps we need to take to prepare us for future ones, then we might yet learn the right lessons.

Antiques galore

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

"ANTIQUES Roadshow" is a British television program that I followed down to its tacky American edition. Trust the British to come up with a game show with some educational value. The bottom line is the same: Some undeserving or ignorant folks earn an obscene amount of money, thus providing viewers with a vicarious thrill or, in my case, filling me with envy.

The format is simple: Antique dealers swoop into some sleepy town and people bring in any old thing lying in their homes for a free evaluation. Often the objects brought in are inherited from some eccentric old aunt who picked it up cheaply on a holiday tour in the last century. After explaining what the object is, the expert asks, "Do you know how much this is worth?" Then as he declares a valuation of, say, 20,000 British pounds for grandma's *orinola*, cameras focus on the surprised face of the owner who swoons and has difficulty breathing. An object that was previously thought worthless suddenly turns into gold. Since there are no TV crews to follow up on these folks, I wouldn't be surprised if, like unfortunate winners of the lotto jackpot, they will be besieged by neighbors, long lost relatives, new-found friends and con men.

The moral of the story is that treasures lie unattended in dusty *bauls* and *bodegas*. Some time ago, I was asked informally about a first edition "Noli Me Tangere" bought online from the Internet. It was signed "*El autor*" on the flyleaf in Rizal's elegant penmanship. I didn't pay much attention until I saw it offered in the Nov. 28, 2004 auction organized by the Philippine Numismatic and Antiquarian Society (PNAS). I don't know if the item was sold, but the auction catalogue listed it as Lot 624 as follows:

"1st Edition Book Noli Me Tangere Published by Berlin Buchdruckerei-Actien-Gesellschaft Setzerinen-Schule des Lette-Vereins, Berlin 1886, one of the greatest and valuable book written by Dr. Jose Rizal leading to the 'Cry of Independence.' At one time, Dr. Jose Rizal even considered burning the manuscript of this book—which might have altered the course of history. The Spanish authorities banned the book for reason that it was heretic and subversive: anyone caught in possession of this book, is subject to imprisonment. The first edition book published in Berlin on 1886 became very rare. This particular first edition book to be auctioned by PNAS has an intriguing question: Inside is a handwritten dedication dedicated to Miss Nelly Boustead, stating 'adieu' and signed '*el autor*.' Mystery surrounds why he would write 'adieu' which actually meant goodbye instead of the usual salutations? And why would he sign '*el autor*' instead of his usual signature? Some Rizalista historian has written of a love story between the two lovers. Extremely rare. US$10,000."

Due to its astronomical price and the fact that my work can proceed smoothly with a cheap facsimile edition published by the National Historical Institute, I did not bother to attend the auction. However, something has to be written regarding the "mystery" alluded to in the auction catalogue.

Actually the book carries no imprint year, and the 1886 date supplied is handwritten in pencil on the cover page by a previous owner or book dealer. The printed dedication in the book is dated "Europa 1886" which is either a typographical error or an indication that Rizal wrote the dedication in 1886 long before he completed the novel. Its printed dedication notwithstanding, the book could not have been printed in 1886 because Rizal himself on the last page of the manuscript of the "Noli" gave the date and time he completed the novel as "*21 de febrero 1887 11 1/2 Noche. Lunes*." The first edition was definitely published and distributed in 1887.

While I did not have a chance to examine the book, the photographs in the PNAS catalogue made the so-called "mystery" easy to crack. The book was not given to Rizal's girlfriend Nelly Boustead but to her mother who is identified clearly as "Mme. Boustead." We all know that Mrs. Boustead did not approve of Rizal, thus our love-struck hero had to be formal and signed "*El autor*" instead of his usual signature or his nickname. Now, why did Rizal have to bid her goodbye (Adieu)? A second look at the inscription will reveal that Rizal actually wrote "Dedica" not "Adieu"; so it reads "A Mme Boustead Dedica El autor." (To Mrs. Boustead is dedicated [this book by] the author.) No love story, no mystery here. Should the reserve price of $10,000 slide down a few hundred dollars?

It would be interesting to have a Philippine edition of "Antiques Roadshow" with antique dealer Ramon Villegas as the bearer of good news; or as Simon of "American Idol" when he spots a fake or something worthless. Other panelists could be art critics Eric Torres, Rod Paras-Perez, or Santiago Pilar. To soften the show with a feminine touch, art dealers like Vita Sarenas or Sylvana Diaz can pitch in. This show will not beat the ratings of show-biz gossip shows and will last two episodes at most. But if it helps in promoting a sense of awareness and value for our cultural heritage, then the "Antiques Roadshow" Philippine edition may well be worth trying. If only to get more authoritative views than auction catalogues, it would be a step in the right direction.

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Mang Dencio's Sona

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

SOME of you might remember that my last New Year's column featured an annual report of sorts from Mang Dencio, our former family driver, who had gone into early retirement after a stroke.

Mang Dencio keeps in touch with annual visits around Christmas, during which he'd tell me about how he and his wife had survived another year—from learning to buy low-cost medicines from the Department of Health's outlets to selling their karaoke machine to bring down their monthly electric bill.

Mang Dencio came around again this year and I thought I should share his stories again. This time though, I'm not going to call it an annual report, which we associate with corporations or profit and loss statements. I'll be bolder and say Mang Dencio—as with each of our men and women on the street—has his own version of the state of the nation address (Sona), and I wish our politicians and policymakers would listen more to his report and those of others.

Grief

Symbolically, Mang Dencio came visiting this year right on the morning of FPJ's funeral. He was a sight: his clothes unironed, his hair unkempt, and it was clear he hadn't shaved for some days. Grief written all over his face, I presumed he was mourning FPJ, but the first sentence he blurted out startled me. "Mike, *wala na siya. Nauna pa sa akin* (She's gone. She went ahead of me)."

He was referring to Aling Auring, his wife. Even before he could sit, he was pouring out details of what had happened. About two years ago, she'd started to bleed, "a senior citizen menstruating" in Mang Dencio's words. They went to see a doctor, who told them it was a myoma and recommended surgery. They couldn't afford it and instead tried Ernie Baron's herbal preparations.

Last September, she started having acute pains around the abdomen so they went to the Philippine General Hospital, where the doctors had her checked in immediately. It was cancer. They recommended surgery; he and Aling Auring agreed they couldn't afford it. Mang Dencio's disability pay had run out and they were living off Aling Auring's SSS retirement check of about P1,500 a month, plus money from renting out two rooms in their home and selling ice candy, which brought in another P3,000.

Within a few days, her other organ systems began to fail. At one point the doctors said dialysis would help. Again, they declined because of the financial burden.

"I thought I was going to die, too," Mang Dencio said, "my blood pressure kept going up and the food at the hospital...why do they serve so much pork?"

They checked out of the hospital and she died a few days later at home.

Emperador

He paused with his story and apologized for nearly forgetting the papayas he'd brought. Aling Auring had planted them. She, too, was the one who thought of constructing two more rooms to rent out and of selling ice candy, and of paying the SSS even if she was never formally employed. It was her SSS that allowed him to reimburse part of the hospital expenses and to give her a decent burial.

"Who would have thought?" he kept repeating. After she died, he closed down their little store and people would ask around, asking if Mang Dencio had passed away. They all knew he had a stroke. But really, he was in good health, taking his medicine regularly, watching his diet, and abstaining from cigarettes and alcohol.

Now without Aling Auring, he wasn't so sure. He had difficulty sleeping he said, so he took a swig of brandy each night. Emperador. He said the doctors had told him beer was bad but brandy was all right, in small amounts.

At one point, he described life as *malungkot*, sad, his eyes misting and that was when I noticed he had cataracts.

He was lonely, without anyone to talk to. He has a son, but he works in Malabon as a waiter and stayed in the restaurant to save on transportation costs, coming home to visit once a week. His pay is "minimum," P150 a day. I protested, no that's much too low, but Dencio said that included free meals and rent.

But life goes on. He still takes in boarders, and he had many stories about them, each one, I guess, reflecting another aspect of the state of our nation. There was the woman whose husband was working overseas and sending money regularly, which she'd squander on *tong-its* (a card game) and mahjong so nothing was left for the rent.

Right now he has two teenage "live-in" couples sharing a room. I actually hear more and more about such couples these days in urban poor areas, some too young to even get married legally but eager to move out from their parents' already congested shacks. Whoever has a job pays for the rent and when they run out of money they move out, eventually drifting away to new partners, unless of course a pregnancy happens, which means an early marriage.

Kindness

Mang Dencio has thought about moving back to the countryside, where he'd be with more relatives and friends. There's his hometown near Dumaguete, but the soil there isn't very productive, he said. His wife's hometown in Iloilo has better soil, but then, he sighed, he's never been good with the land, with farming.

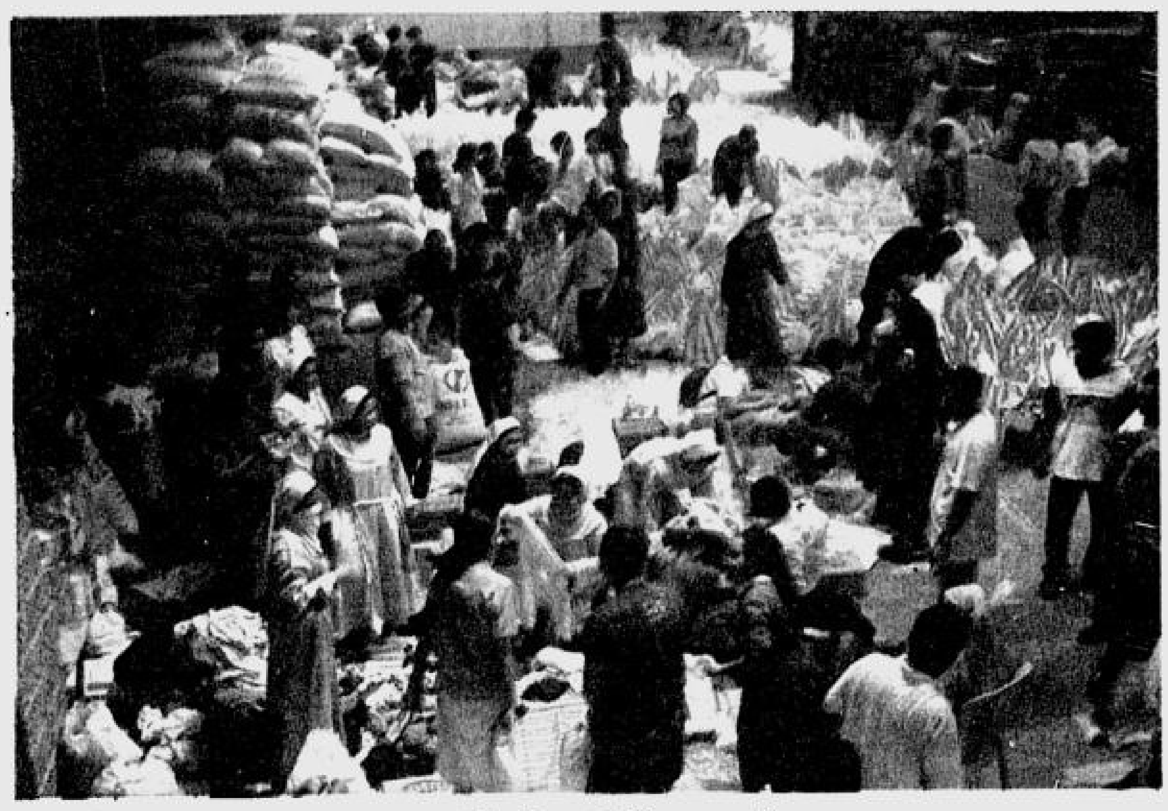
I asked about his SSS. He was working on finishing payments so he could get retirement checks. He smiled remembering how I had written about his difficulties getting his first disability checks. The SSS responded quickly and he remembers, with eternal gratitude, Deng Legazpi of SSS' corporate communications helping out. Some of his friends had come around asking him if Deng could help them too, and he had told them, no, it would be asking too much.

I've written about how intimidating government procedures can be, which is why we have so many fixers in those offices; and radio and television programs offering help, creating political careers for their hosts. In Mang Dencio's community in Antipolo, people know of "Mike Tan," the one writing in the INQUIRER who had helped him when he had difficulties with the SSS, even if most of them don't get to read the INQUIRER.

Recently, while watching TV with neighbors, one of them shouted, "*Uy*, isn't that Mang Dencio's friend at the INQUIRER?" I asked if it was one of my interviews and Mang Dencio laughed: "No, Star Quest." That's a GMA-7 television show where viewers can text in to vote for their favorite young talent. One of the leading contenders (my bias) is a kid named Mike Tan. No, we're not related but I'm tempted to claim that, given his good looks, and yes, he looks *mabait*, kind, too.

The morning passed by quickly, the television blaring away in the background with FPJ's funeral. He would have gone too, Mang Dencio said, but he was worried about the crowds, especially since the stroke left him limping.

"*Mabait siya*," Mang Dencio said of FPJ. *Mabait* again, a kind man. If only *bait* is all it takes so we can solve a nation's problems, so Aling Auring could have lived longer, and Mang Dencio could live better.



A better world, if only. . .

ALLOW me to comment on the calamity brought about by the recent super typhoons.

First, I appreciate the generosity of the people who have shared what they have with the victims. Millions of pesos have been raised to help the afflicted ones. But this makes me wonder as to where these millions were when the dead and the living victims could still work for a decent life.

If only those millions came long before the typhoons hit the country, the victims would have had no need to employ themselves in the illegal logging business. If only the rich were more thoughtful and cared to share their wealth, there would be no suffering people.

Now, the dead victims wouldn't even be able to thank the "benevolent individuals" for the leftovers that have been shared with them.

I feel disappointed seeing people going to malls and plush restaurants in luxury cars (which I hope were purchased legally). I wonder if it ever occurred to them that there are a lot people who barely eat in a day. If only the money spent extravagantly are used to create livelihood opportunities for the unemployed, the poor and the impoverished while they are still alive, then this world would be a better place to live in; perhaps, there would be less crimes and suffering; and there would be no tears unnecessarily shed; and we would see more smiling faces everywhere.

If you want this to happen, then share your blessings. Be thoughtful. Stop extravagance. And do it now.

—MARIETTA JEAN BACALLA,
RTC Branch 25,
Danao City

How to educate our voters

I BELIEVE that the only way to solve our country's ills is to educate our voters and to enlighten them on the importance of putting honest and competent men in government. This can be done by emphasizing to them what happened when they:

1. Elected a so-called economist who is fond of bringing a personal beautician when traveling to other places for President.

2. Elected an actor-turned-politician who could not uphold family values and make himself a model of honesty.

3. Put in Malacañang a housewife who was only driven to run for president by circumstances and by the desire to rid the country of her enemy. Look at what happened to the government's agrarian reform program; an honest woman, she gave in to the interest of her relatives.

4. Voted as president a military man who was so fond of traveling abroad and of inviting foreigners to invest in our country to solve the unemployment problem, thinking that if they invested in our country, they would eventually love our country and would not take their profits elsewhere.

5. Placed people in Gongress who come from big and influential political/business dynasties.

It is time to kick crooked and overstaying politicians out of the government and put new faces up there.

It is also time that the government create an independent court to speedily try all corrupt officials (from barangay officials to presidents). What better punishment could there be for all those found guilty than life imprisonment without pardon and amnesty.

—JULIE P. ROMANO,
Long Beach,
California, USA

An LTO mystery

LAST Oct. 28, I went to the Land Transportation Office at 20th Avenue, Quezon City, to renew my car's registration. To my surprise, there was a computer alert indicating I had a violation that had not been cleared by the LTO's Law Enforcement and Traffic Adjudication System (Letas).

I did incur a traffic violation in October 2003, but I had settled that case at the office of the Metro Manila Development Authority in Guadalupe, Makati City. In fact, I had the receipt with me. Thinking that it was a simple case of lack of coordination between the two agencies, I proceeded promptly to the LTO office in East Avenue to secure the Letas clearance. There, after an hour's wait, I got the shock of my life: I had to get a clearance in La Union! Apparently, a certain Edgar Deloso drove my car all the way to La Union on Sept. 5, 2002, got a ticket for not wearing his seatbelt and had not since settled his case. Worse, my plate number was added somewhere on the page using a different font and, on top of that, my receipt (my only proof of payment) mysteriously disappeared.

I was furious, but I didn't get hysterical. I did not even bother to question the inconsistencies in the circumstances of the violation. I have never been to La Union; neither have I ever lent my car to anyone, much less to a complete stranger named Edgar Deloso. Whether behind the wheel or on the passenger seat, I always buckle up. I knew it was futile to argue. I was certain somebody or some people just wanted to extort money from me. But being a government employee myself, I am not one to easily give in to corruption in a public office. And so, after getting a grip on myself, I solicited the advice of a relative who is chief of an LTO division. "How did this happen?" he asked. I figured there was an immediate presumption of my guilt, so I just decided to give up on him, feeling totally helpless.

To cut a long story short, after weeks of frustration, anger and much distress (going to La Union for a violation I did not commit was completely out of the question), I was referred to someone at the Human Resources office of the LTO. She turned out to be the only sensible employee of this despicable government agency. She gladly helped me and brought me to the chief of Letas, who was at a loss himself as to how a car that had never gone farther north than Subic could get involved in an infraction in La Union, incurred by a driver totally unknown to its owner.

Unfortunately, the computer wizards at Letas had been able to make it "electronically" appear that my car was really involved in the apprehension. I had no choice but to settle the case by fax with the LTO office in San Fernando, La Union.

Is it any wonder that tax evaders abound in our country?

—JOSE TEODORO C. VERA CRUZ,
14-A President Quirino St.,
Industrial Valley Subd.,
Marikina City 1802

Flattered and grateful

I AM the municipal mayor of San Nicolas, Pangasinan, the one referred to in the letter of Rev. Eduardo D. Eduarte titled "Jewels shining in the dark night." (PDI, 12/4/04)

I am truly thankful that the reverend has recovered from his illness. It is true that when I sent the municipal ambulance to bring the reverend to Manila, I rarely knew nor heard of him. I never met him before but just the same, when a representation in his behalf was made in my office, I ordered that the travel documents be immediately processed including the initial gasoline subsidy. It is a policy of my office to give priority to patients regardless of who or what they are and whatever time or day it is.

In my six months in office, I never expected that such act of public service would have qualified me as a jewel shining in the dark night. I am flattered.

Thank you reverend and please pray for that jewel to continuously shine.

—LEONCIO S. SALDIVAR III,
mayor, San Nicolas,
Pangasinan

Review questionable contracts

MALACAÑANG and the Supreme Court have started scrutinizing certain contracts (including some already in force).

Businessmen, business organizations and business consultancies have expressed concern that this initiative could send negative "signals" to prospective investors whom we desperately need to revitalize our economy.

Assuming, as perhaps we should, that these contracts were entered into in good faith, then these concerns are fully justified.

However, so many of these contracts appear so one-sided in favor of the project proponents (to the prejudice of the public) such that questions have been raised whether or not they are fraudulent. Let us bear in mind that fraudulent contracts are invalid per se, hence cannot plead the protection due valid, legitimate contracts.

The (responsible) business sector should therefore welcome, encourage, even demand that the government pursue the scrutiny of questionable contracts, rescind the fraudulent ones and impose maximum penalties on all guilty parties.

This "signal" should encourage legitimate business and deter the "carpetbaggers."

—ALFREDO V. ASUNCION,
93 Castrillo St.,
Ugong Norte, Quezon City

GMA's sin against our environment

THIS is a reaction to Peter Wallace's letter, "Mining good for the country" (PDI, 12/13/04), which hailed the Supreme Court as a "savior" for declaring the Mining Act of 1995 as "constitutional."

He obviously wrote from the viewpoint of foreign mining corporations that would greatly benefit from the Supreme Court ruling. Working among poor peasants and indigenous peoples, we have seen how decades of foreign plunder of Philippine resources have brought massive deforestation, displacement of communities and disasters, such as the Marcopper tragedy and the latest landslides that claimed hundreds of lives and properties.

In our view, the Mining Act of 1995—and all similar laws that allow the unhampered exploitation of our resources and labor—are morally and legally unacceptable. We thus, strongly reject Malacañang's and the Supreme Court's justification in granting foreign entities 100-percent control over the exploitation of our country's mineral resources.

Can Wallace identify a morally and socially responsible multinational mining company here? As far as the Philippine experience can attest, foreign mining companies such as, Marcopper, Western Mining Corp., Benguet Inc., and TVI Inc., have never been socially and morally responsible. They squeeze huge profits through plunder of the earth's resources while blatantly denying workers of their right to just and living wage.

The Supreme Court has done a great disservice to the Filipino people by overturning its earlier judgment. But even before that, President Macapagal-Arroyo had already issued official memos and executive orders practically legalizing massive logging and unhampered mining.

Through Memorandum Circular No. 67, "Directing the Operationalization of the Mineral Action Plan (MAP) for Mineral Resources Development," and Executive Order 270 and 270-A, "National Policy Agenda on Revitalizing Mining in the Philippines," GMA defined the major policy guidelines to "revitalize" the mining industry by giving more economic and political privileges to foreign mining companies. The MAP effectively amended the implementing rules and regulations of the Mining Act to fast-track the procedures in the processing of mining applications and in the issuance of permits to mining companies.

Far from averting disasters and ridding the country of its gargantuan debts, granting unlimited foreign ownership and control over the exploitation of forests and mineral resources will bring irreversible environmental and socioeconomic disasters. Thus, with or without the Supreme Court reversal, we hold Ms Arroyo directly accountable for the grave violations of our national sovereignty and patrimony.

—REV. FR. ALLAN JOSE ARCEBUCHE,
national co-chair,
Promotion of Church People's Response,
3/F NCCP Bldg., 879 Edsa, QC

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Yushchenko's real fight begins

NEWS ANALYSIS

Mara D. Bellaby

KIEV, Ukraine—Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko's victory in Ukraine's presidential election heralds the end of a hard-fought battle. But his real fight is just beginning.

He is poised to take the helm of a deeply divided nation—one at odds with its biggest trading partner, wracked by corruption and gripped by tensions following the election held last Nov. 21, whose annulment amid allegations of widespread fraud, forced Sunday's "rerun."

Ukraine's economy is booming, but most of its key industries are controlled by a handful of tycoons, most of whom backed Yushchenko's opponent, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, who had been declared winner of the tainted Nov. 21 balloting.

And the political team Yushchenko must rely on to fulfill the dreams of millions of Ukrainians—who have turned Yushchenko's very name into a chant of hope—is a coalition of groups and individuals with vastly different ideas about how much power the presidency should have.

Adding to Yushchenko's troubles, Yanukovych has given no indication that he is in any rush to concede, clouding Yushchenko's victory with the threat of a prolonged court battle over its legitimacy.

"It will be a tough presidency," said Frank Luntz, a US Republican Party pollster who teamed up with a Democratic Party pollster, Douglas Schoen, to conduct an exit poll that gave Yushchenko a 15-percentage point margin over his opponent. Early monday, with more than 90 percent of the votes counted, Yushchenko was ahead with 53 percent of the votes against his rival's 43 percent.

The bitter campaign deepened the rift between Ukraine's Russian-speaking, heavily industrialized east, which includes cosmopolitan Kiev, and the country's west, where Ukrainian nationalism runs deep. Some eastern regions have raised the specter of seeking greater economic autonomy, igniting fears they might refuse to hand over tax revenues, starving the country's national budget.

"The situation in the east will be a very big challenge," said Darya Glushenko, a political analyst with the Kiev-based International Center for Policy Studies. "He will have to be very attentive to this region, to its problems ... because right now, they believe he is ignoring them, that he is hostile toward them."

That won't be easy. Yushchenko tried to reach out to the east ahead of the Supreme Court-ordered re-vote, but the exit polls showed he picked up little new support there.

It also remains unclear whether Yushchenko will be able to smooth over relations with the Kremlin, Ukraine's former Soviet-era master. Russian President Vladimir Putin openly backed Yanukovych, and while he has said that he could work with Yushchenko, he also suggested that Yushchenko's strength came as a result of foreign meddling, notably by the United States.

Yushchenko, a former Central Bank chief, has pledged to bring this nation of 48 million closer to the West by getting the country a bigger role in international bodies such as the European Union. But Russia remains a giant investor in Ukrainian business, and Ukraine is a key consumer of Russian goods.

Yushchenko promised that his first foreign trip would be to Moscow, and he told journalists last week that "I have no intention of creating new problems."

Leonid Polyakov, a political analyst with the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Studies, said that Yushchenko would be expected to push economic reforms, particularly promoting small- and medium-sized businesses and cleaning up Ukraine's government of corruption.

Yushchenko has warned that he might take another look at some of Ukraine's privatization deals, including this summer's allegedly crooked privatization of the country's largest steel producer, Kryvorizhstal. It was sold to a company controlled by outgoing President Leonid Kuchma's son-in-law, Viktor Pinchuk.

The next Ukrainian president also takes over an office with reduced powers, as a result of political reform measures adopted by parliament after the Nov. 21 runoff. However, Yushchenko suggested he might challenge the changes—which have given parliament more authority over the appointment of the president's Cabinet.

But such a challenge will be tricky. A key member of Yushchenko's coalition is Socialist leader Oleksandr Moroz, who had demanded the political reform measures in exchange for his support. Moroz helped bring Yushchenko votes among some urban and elderly Ukrainians, and he heads a parliamentary faction that Yushchenko needs on his side to push measures through parliament.

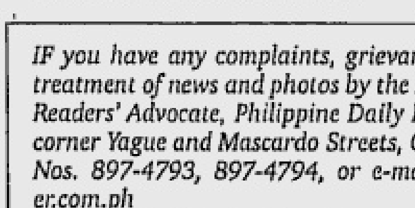
Yushchenko also must find a place in his government for the popular but divisive Yulia Tymoshenko. After declaring victory, Yushchenko was temporarily upstaged by chants of "Yulia! Yulia!" from the crowd on Independence Square. The usually fiery Tymoshenko stayed in the background this time, and the crowd was led back to a chant of "Yushchenko! President!"

Perhaps the biggest task for Yushchenko will be to persuade Ukrainians to be patient. For many, he has come to embody all of their dreams: hopes of higher salaries, greater freedom to travel, more international respect and a brighter future.

"Yushchenko has really come to believe in his own propaganda," said Mykhailo Pohrebinsky, a political analyst with links to Kuchma. "It is a very dangerous mistake."

Lyudmila Nikitina, 57, disagreed, saying that Yushchenko's victory was the result of a huge public effort—and that his success in office will be, as well.

"Of course, we have put our hopes in Yushchenko because for so long now, Ukraine needed such a leader, someone who could take us down a correct, European and democratic path," she said. "We found him in Yushchenko, but we also found that some of those qualities are in all of us. So we know our future is not just in Yushchenko's hands but also in our own." *AP*



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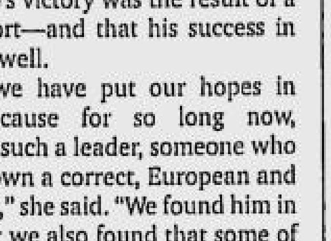

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INQUIRER Northern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Rolando B. Fernandez

2004 a bad year for Central Luzon

YEARENDER

By Tonette Orejas
City of San Fernando

GAUGING by the scope of destruction from disasters and casualties from political and labor turmoil, 2004 has been a bad year for Central Luzon.

DISASTERS. Christmas was a period of mourning and despair as landslides followed four storms in November and December. The landslides and flash floods killed at least 200 people, mostly entire families, buried more than 1,000 houses, damaged farms and fishing grounds, and virtually erased villages in Aurora and Nueva Ecija.

Unprecedented in local history, these disasters spoke of the over-exploited state of the forests of the Sierra Madre mountain range that could not anymore withstand the strong rains that triggered the flash floods and consequently, the deadly landslides.

In August, almost half of Central Luzon was flooded. Nearly one million people were displaced and about 20 people were killed in the floods. Triggered by strong rains caused by Typhoons "Marce" and "Chaba," the floods were in the scale of the 1972 floods.

Labor

HACIENDA LUISITA. The labor dispute at the Cojuangco family-owned sugar estate Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac hit boiling point in November.

At least seven people were killed and more than 300 others were hurt as policemen and Army soldiers dispersed striking workers at Hacienda Luisita on Nov. 16.

The Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as the police, the military and the National Bureau of Investigation, launched separate investigations to look into the violence at the sugar estate.

PINOYS TRAPPED IN WAR. The United States-led war in Iraq and the anger it spawned among insurgents reverberated at the local front.

The hostage-taking of driver Angelo de la Cruz, the death of Filipino-American Sgt. Maurice Keith Fortune, worker Raymond Natividad and accountant Feliciano Dizon, and the wounding of numerous Filipinos in many terror attacks since July, also signified the greater dangers on the lives of overseas Filipinos.

INSURGENCY. About 20 encounters between government forces and communist guerrillas, mostly from the New People's Army, were monitored in 2004. The biggest clashes broke out in Zambales, Bulacan and Tarlac. The death toll on both sides reached about 50. The NPA commands in the region ended the year with four assaults on Army and police stations.

Marcos folly

BNPP REVIVAL. The planned revival of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant or the conversion of its mothballed facilities as a gas-fired energy plant worried many. Sen. Joker Arroyo called the plan a resurrection of a "Marcos folly." Others raised questions on safety, given that the BNPP sits on earthquake-prone Mt. Natib and flaws attended its construction 30 years ago.

TOLL RATES. The government poised a new problem on motorists and commuters in Northern and Central Luzon. Higher toll fees are sure to come in January after it did not put to task the state-owned Philippine National Construction Corp. in rehabilitating the North Luzon Expressway and gave the work instead to the Lopez-led Manila North Tollways Corp.

CL NOT GMA STRONGHOLD. The elections last May gave President Macapagal-Arroyo another mandate, but her home region of Central Luzon proved to be not her bailiwick. Only the Kapampangan provinces of Pampanga and Tarlac gave her more votes to win against the late actor Fernando Poe Jr. who led in Nueva Ecija, Zambales, Bataan, Bulacan and Aurora.

GAMBLING MOGUL. The seven-hour visit of Macau gambling mogul Stanley Ho in Clark in March, supposedly to receive a doctorate degree from the Angeles University Foundation, whipped up unsavory reports on Arroyo's presidential campaign.

The whirlwind visit spawned reports of Ho's alleged contribution to Ms Arroyo's campaign funds, the revival of Ho's floating casino project and his interest in establishing new casinos in the country. The administration denied all these.

Bright spot

SUBIC, CLARK. A bright point in the region was the crucial role of the two former American bases in the 10-point economic agenda of the President.

Envisioned as Southeast Asia's primary logistics, warehousing, manufacturing and transport hub, the administration had dedicated many infrastructure projects to these, including the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Toll Road, NorthRail and the Subic's seaport—all on foreign loans.

The Diosdado Macapagal International Airport in Clark and the Subic International Airport had become the hubs of two cargo-moving giants, the Federal Express and the United Parcel Service.

However, smuggling remained a major problem in the two economic zones.

WAR GAMES. US troops continued to make Subic and Clark the sites of military exercises jointly held with Filipino soldiers and under the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement.

But two events of contrast—a US military ship's alleged dumping of human wastes into Subic Bay in July and the relief missions for landslide victims in December via Clark—had stirred ambivalence toward the US military.

The toxic contaminants at the former American bases, their spread to surrounding communities, the deaths and illnesses these had been causing, continued to raise concerns among environmentalists and humanitarian groups, including Princess Caroline of Monaco, who visited communities in Subic and Clark in October.

AGRICULTURE. Rains that fed the Angat Dam in the last two months of the year eased the competition for water for irrigation. But the water war was expected to worsen in the dry months, with farmers decrying the policy of giving more water to Metro Manila than to Pampanga and Bulacan farms that produced the food for the country's capital.

The smuggling of onions, coming in numerous containers in Manila ports, continued to hurt Nueva Ecija farmers. Efforts to stop it had been perceived to be nil.

Meat processors dealt with pork shortage due largely to an importation ban amid the outbreak of bird flu in Southeast Asia. Government approved tests on the banned shrimp vannamei that were already being illegally cultured in Central Luzon.

AN EXODUS of people crosses the Castillano bridge in San Leonardo, Nueva Ecija at the height of several typhoons last Nov. 30. ERIK ARAZAS

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Santa comes in form of Gloria in Cagayan

By Desiree Caluza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

SOLANA, Cagayan—"We are here to bring Christmas cheers for the typhoon victims."

Thus said President Macapagal-Arroyo on Monday after distributing relief goods and sacks of seedlings to the farmers and their families who were badly hit by four successive typhoons this year in this farming province.

The President, who was in her cheerful gift-giving mood, visited Tuguegarao City and this town to make the national government's presence felt among the displaced families who were recently hit by Typhoon "Yoyong."

About 1,000 people were killed or displaced in Cagayan by super typhoons "Yoyong" and "Winnie."

Ms Arroyo said bringing Christmas cheers to calamity affected areas was a reminder that the government had not forgotten. "We are facing the rehabilitation portion, we have not forgotten your needs," she said in a press briefing here.

Tuguegarao City was the first area outside Metro Manila that the President visited after spending her Christmas holidays. She arrived with members of the First Family on Sunday afternoon in Baguio City for a week-long vacation.

"After the typhoon, you never saw anyone smile in this village because of the calamity. We were badly hit, the flood was so high that it was higher than our waist, it was so sad," Mario Mallillim, regional federation president of Barangay Tanods, told the INQUIRER.

"But now look at them, they are all smiling and excited about what they are about to receive," Mallillim said referring to the residents of Barangay Linao del Norte who were waiting for the President.

Ms Arroyo distributed relief goods to 40 families in five barangays in Linao Elementary School in Tuguegarao City and P2.75 million worth of rice and vegetable seedlings.

She also presented a check for P1 million to Cagayan Gov. Edgar Lara for typhoon victims.

In Barangay Lanao alone, 90 percent of the 3,000 residents suffered from the calamity, he said. *With reports from Estanislao Caldez and Villamor Visaya Jr., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Kidnap victim's remains found

COTABATO CITY—Military authorities on Tuesday recovered the skeletal remains of a Filipino-Chinese car dealer kidnapped here in 2003.

Maj. Gen. Raul Relano, 6th Infantry Division chief, said the remains of kidnap victim Norman Sia, 27, were found in a dry, deep hole near the mountains of Barangay Separan in Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao.

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Battalion, said military doctors and Sia's relatives identified the remains as that of the car dealer based on dental records.

Ando said they discovered Sia's grave following reports from civilian informants.

Barangay Separan is about 2 km from the highway and could only be reached by horse and by foot.

Sia was selling a Kia Pride car on Dec. 8, 2003 to unidentified kidnappers, posing as buyers.

The suspects asked to meet him for a test drive of the vehicle.

Sia had not been seen since. Two days later, the car he was selling was found abandoned in front of a mall in Tacurong City.

His parents had received a note with the kidnappers' P5 million ransom demand.

The family did not pay up saying they did not have ways to raise the money.

Earlier, military agents blamed the Pentagon gang, led by Alonto Tahir, as the group behind Sia's abduction.

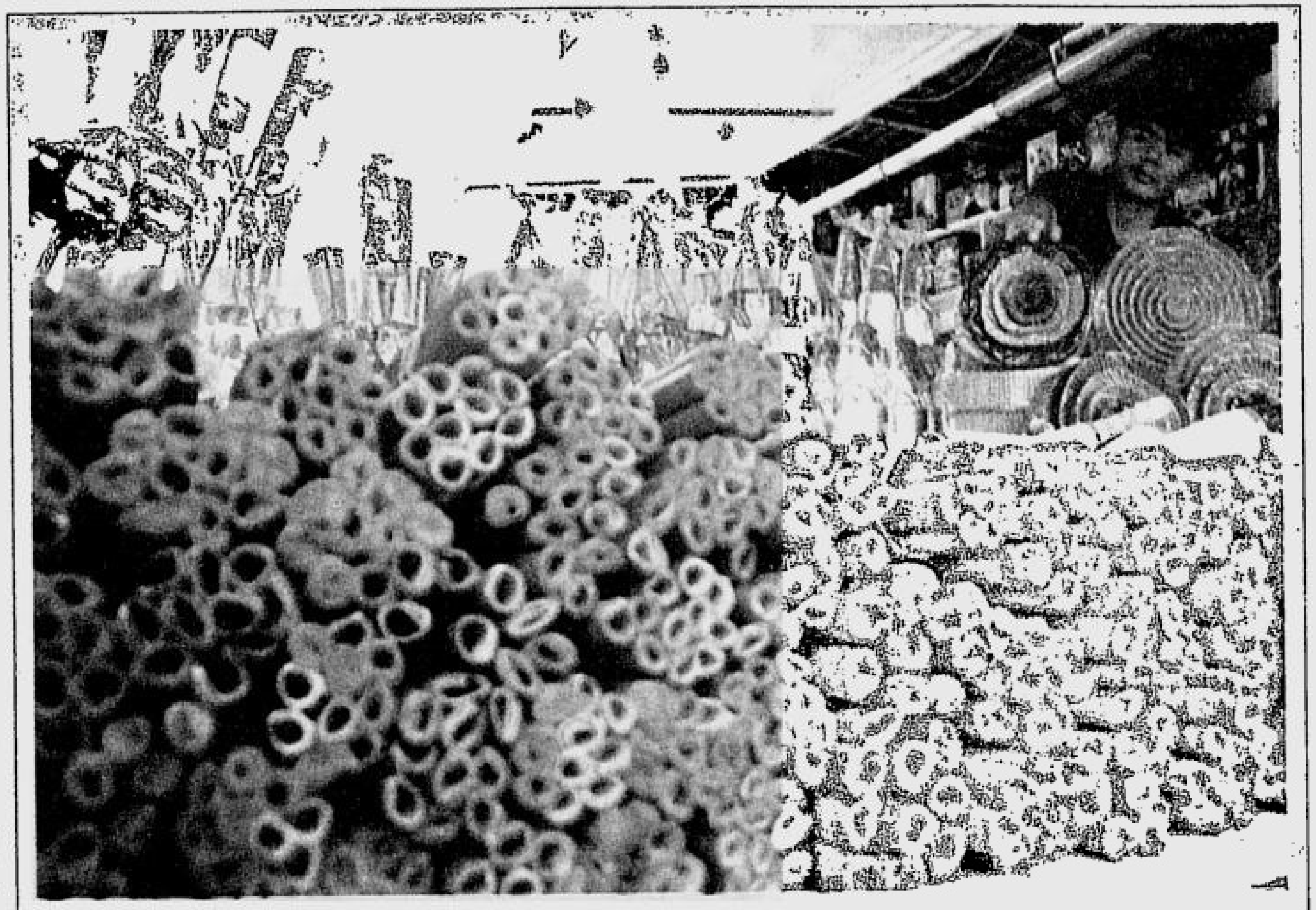
Later, it said that Sia was passed to another faction and was hidden in the Maguindanao side of the Liguasan Marsh.

A series of operation was conducted by the military in the towns surrounding the marsh but there was no sight of Sia or his abductors.

Instead, the search and rescue operations led to clashes between government troops and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels that nearly endangered the resumption of the stalled peace talks.

Later, the MILF agreed to help locate Sia's kidnappers but the operation proved unsuccessful.

No word was heard about Sia until the MILF said it received reports he was executed because of the family's continued refusal to pay ransom. *Edwin Fernandez, PDI Mindanao Bureau*



READY FOR THE REVELRY REM ZAMORA
Fireworks are on display at a stall in Bocaue, Bulacan awaiting buyers. Authorities have been warning against the use of firecrackers and pyrotechnics to celebrate the New Year but there's no stopping many revelers from using the noise-makers.

Troops on isolated island gets visit from AFP chief

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—Soldiers assigned to the Kalayaan Island Group (KIG) celebrated a late Christmas yesterday with the highest officers in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

To boost morale and conduct a yearly inspection, AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Efren Abu visited the soldiers yesterday.

The chief of staff was accompanied by Philippine Army Commanding Officer Lt. Gen. Generoso Senga, Philippine Navy Flag Officer in Command Vice Admiral Ernesto de Leon, Philippine Air Force Commanding Officer Gen. Jose Reyes, Western Command Chief Vadm. Ruben Domingo and other top AFP officers.

They were on board a PAF C-130 plane that arrived on Monday from Zamboanga and Tawi-Tawi.

Abu said he decided to visit the troops in Tawi-Tawi, Jolo, Zamboanga and KIG because this was the most appropriate time of the year to give support to their soldiers who were doing their duties even as the nation was on holiday.

"This is also the time when every officer is available for the regular inspection of troops," he added.

The AFP head did not say whether he would have a post-Christmas party with the soldiers but it has been a practice to bring in roasted pig for the "boodle."

He said the troops on Pagasa Island and other islands surrounding the KIG are very important to the country's claim to the contested island group.

According to WesCom Chief Domingo, the KIG, located in Palawan, is geologically and economically important to the country.

To secure KIG, the Malampaya Natural Gas-to-Power Project and all gas and oil deposits in Palawan and its environment is among the priorities of the AFP. *Jofelle Tesorio, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

MILF sees tough, lengthy peace talks with gov't panel

DAVAO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) yesterday said its panel of negotiators foresees "a hard and prolonged bargaining" during the resumption of the peace talks in Kuala Lumpur in February next year.

Eid Kabalu, MILF spokesperson, said that several issues could prove to be "sticky."

These include the issue on ancestral domain.

Kabalu said the issue of ancestral domain alone could become very sticky "given the fact that it has several substantial components like territory, natural resources, and governance."

Kabalu said "neither side would like to compromise" positions.

He said even if the MILF and government managed to hurdle the issue on ancestral domain, they also have to contend with the issue on political settlement of the rebellion in Mindanao.

Kabalu said the MILF maintains its position that the political settlement should be just, lasting, comprehensive, and acceptable to the Moro people.

Malacañang has been proposing the expansion of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) but the MILF has continuously rejected it, saying the autonomous system failed to solve the Moro rebellion.

"It has been in existence for years now and the discontent among the Bangsamoro grows by the day," Kabalu said.

During the recent round of exploratory talks in Kuala Lumpur, the government and the MILF have agreed on several points including the agenda for the formal round of negotiations.

Aside from the ancestral domain issue, government and rebel negotiators also agreed to accredit a non-government organization as observer.

But as to which NGO, both sides have yet to agree according to Kabalu.

The INQUIRER learned that at least 10 NGOs wanted to be granted observer status during the negotiations.

Kabalu said the implementing guidelines for the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), a body that would run after criminals in or near MILF areas in Mindanao and Sulu, would also be discussed during the next exploratory talks.

The AHJAG was created on May 6, 2002, but the negotiators failed to finalize the guidelines for its operation.

Prof. Abhoud Syed Mansur Lingga, leader of the Bangsamoro People's Consultative Assembly (BPCA), urged the MILF and the government to agree on the holding of a referendum to determine the fate of the Moro people. *Allan Nawal, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Army, NPA blame each other for councilor's slay

CITY OF CALAPAN—Military and police officials, on one hand, and the New People's Army, on the other, are blaming each other on the killing of first councilor Francisco Gatdula of Sta. Cruz, Occidental Mindoro.

Gatdula was gunned down some 30 meters from his residence while on his way to watch the "panuluyan" (reenactment of Jesus' nativity) in the church at about 9 p.m., Dec. 24.

The following day was supposed to be a family reunion. After the Christmas Eve Mass, his son Father Giovanni, assistant parish priest in San Jose, learned of the killing and rushed home.

Father Gatdula said his father was still brought to Mamburao, 32 km away, but was declared dead on arrival with four shots.

"Assailants threw something like a Judas belt, that was why there was smoke according to witnesses," the young Gatdula told the INQUIRER in a phone interview.

Police came at about 9:30 p.m., residents related.

Senior Supt. Antonio Atienza Jr., Occidental Mindoro Provincial Police Office director, said police had filed a case at the municipal trial court against Rolando Laylo alyas Ka Magsay and Ka Dugmay.

Atienza said the NPA could have been angered by Gatdula's presence during a mass surrender of NPA sympathizers in Barangay Casague, Sta. Cruz on Oct. 21, a month after Gatdula drafted the Sangguniang Bayan's position against the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit.

Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, Communist Party of the Philippines spokesperson, told the INQUIRER that it was the death squad of the 16th Infantry Brigade that was behind Gatdula's killing because he was linked to Left-leaning group Ginintuang Butil in the 1970s.

He said Gatdula was known for his anti-Cafgu advocacy and for being vocal against the military.

The family of the slain councilor has requested a more thorough investigation of his killing.

"We don't know of any personal enemy of his. He always stood for the truth and was so optimistic and idealistic. The people tell us how much a loss he is to Sta. Cruz, he was a fiscalizer here. We're hoping for justice," Father Gatdula said.

He added: "The people are caught between warring forces of the military and the NPA here. Our place used to be very quiet."

But Atienza said Gatdula's case was the fifth killing in less than a year, making Sta. Cruz the most troubled town in Occidental Mindoro.

"We're letting the police investigate and if they say it's the NPA, then we'll have to act on that," said Col. Ralph Villanueva, deputy commander of the 204th Infantry Brigade based in Oriental Mindoro.

On the NPA's disclaimer, he said: "They'll always deny and that it's not different from their hit list published on the front page of the INQUIRER."

"Gatdula was not just a father to Jojo (Father Gatdula). He was also an ally in the anti-Cafgu sentiment, among others. He was a progressive and principled public official; low profile, not showy, not a *trapo* (traditional politician)," said Fr. Philip Alcantara, director of the Social Services Commission of the Apostolic Vicariate of San Jose.

Bishop Antonio Palang, who was on Lubang Islang, when the crime happened, is expected to issue a statement in the coming days.

"He always thought of what was good for the community. As a father, he never intruded in our decisions, always supportive in our career," said Father Gatdula. *Madonna Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

ROUNDUP

Drug lord slain

TACLOBAN CITY—A drug lord in Eastern Samar and a namesake of Northern Samar Gov. Raul Daza was shot dead at the downtown area of Borongan, Eastern Samar at 4 p.m. on Dec. 15. Chief Supt. Dionisio Coloma Jr., police director of Eastern Visayas, said Raul Daza, reportedly the biggest drug supplier in Eastern Samar and No. 15 among the region's most wanted persons, was shot in his right temple by one of three motorcycle-riding men minutes after he alighted from his motorcycle on Real Street. Police said they still did not know who killed Daza, who was in the order of battle of the Philippine Drug Law Enforcement Agency.

Joey Gabieta, PDI Visayas Bureau

Rape suspect dies

DAVAO CITY—A rape suspect here died after he jumped off a ravine as he was about to be arrested by authorities Dec. 21. Police said members of the Paquibato police station were on their way to Freceliano Hermoso's house to enforce an arrest order against him but the suspect ran and jumped into the ravine. Hermoso, 50, was rushed to the Davao Medical Center here where he was declared dead on arrival.

Anthony Allada, PDI Mindanao Bureau

3 killed in mishaps

PILA, Laguna—Three persons died in three separate road accidents in three Laguna towns on Dec. 19. Three persons were injured in other accidents. Police identified the fatalities as Naldy Piamonte, 32, of Barangay Azupre, Pangil; Nolasco Bonita, of Barangay Kabulusan, Pakil; and Christian Tapay, 20, of Barangay Tubuan, Pila.

Romulo Ponte, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

New administrator

CITY OF CALAPAN—With a new governor, Oriental Mindoro has a new provincial administrator, lawyer Adel Abas. Abas replaced acting provincial administrator Samson Rivera last Dec. 13. Abas was city administrator from 1995 to 2004, when Gov. Arnan Panaligan was city mayor.

Madonna Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

NPAs ambush soldiers

LUCENA CITY—New People's Army rebels fired upon Army troopers in Sitio Sona, Barangay San Diego, Gumaca, Quezon on Dec. 19, according to a military report. The soldiers under the 76th Infantry Battalion were then visiting the barangay to "check on the situation after the typhoons to pave the way for the delivery of needed government assistance," according to Maj. Jose Broso, commander of the military's 2nd Civil Relations Group-Civil Relations Service. Broso said the Army soldiers were able to return fire and forced the rebels to withdraw in different directions. No casualty was reported on both sides.

Delfin Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

3 killed in shootout

CALAMBA CITY—Three persons were killed in a shootout in Barangay Lecheria this city on Dec. 12. Supt. Edmund Zaide, city police chief, identified the fatalities as SPO1 Gregorio Padilla and construction workers Nestor Legazpi, 40, and Caesar Baybado, 41. Zaide said hours before the shooting happened, they received a phone call at around midnight from a resident of Barangay Looc who informed them that a certain Robert Espinosa was stabbed by Legazpi and Baybado inside the Mahogany Hills. Zaide said the three worked at the construction inside the subdivision. Responding policemen, led by SPO3 Reynaldo Siman and PO1 Allen Laurente, found the bloodied Espinosa in the area but could not locate the suspects. Later, police arrested the suspects in the town plaza, and brought them to the police station. After the interrogation, police investigators brought Legazpi and Baybado to the hospital for medical examination. On their way back from the hospital, Legazpi grabbed the Armalite rifle of SPO1 Gregorio Padilla, who was seated with the suspects inside the patrol vehicle, and shot Padilla, who died on the spot. The two then jumped off from the vehicle and tried to escape. But PO3 Danilo Cardona, who was driving the patrol car, pursued the suspects and traded shots with them. After the 20-minute gunfight, Legazpi and Baybado lay dead from gunshot wounds.

Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

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Editor Ester G. Dipasupil ■ Assistant Editor Cenon B. Bibe

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Striking port workers, policemen injured in dispersal operations

By Leila B. Salaverria

PICKETING port employees protesting the retrenchment of fellow workers clashed with police yesterday morning at the Manila North Harbor's Pier 12, resulting in injuries on both sides.

The spokesperson for the port workers claimed the policemen had fired at unarmed strikers, and also attacked them with sticks.

But police said there were several members of the National Capital Region Police Office who were hurt in the dispersal operations when they were hit by stones presumably thrown by the workers.

"I heard gunshots," said Fernando Red, spokesperson for the Samahan ng Supervisor sa Pantalan who was among the 50 or so workers dispersed in front of the Sulpicio lines office at Pier 12.

Red said he saw policemen in blue uniforms aim their guns at the workers, and then pointed these upwards after firing several shots.

He added that the security personnel of the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA) were involved in dispersing the workers, hitting them with sticks and pushing them away.

The injured workers, numbering around 20, were brought to various hospitals in Metro Manila for treatment.

Dispersal

"Our rally was peaceful. We were not causing any trouble. We were shouting slogans when they came near us, and the dispersal followed," Red told the INQUIRER.

However, there were reports that the workers threw molotov cocktails during the dispersal, as empty bottles were seen at the site yesterday.

Red, however, denied that he and his fellow workers had thrown the homemade grenades.

Interviewed over radio, PPA port manager Alex Cruz said that security personnel had no choice but to disperse the workers because the latter were holding up the transport of goods.

"We had to do something because the bulk of the cargo would get spoiled," he said.

Besides, he added, the shipment need to be taken out of the pier because there was also a lot of cargo that had to be loaded on the ships.

Illegal?

Cruz said the workers were dispersed because the strike was illegal.

There were ongoing negotiations between the workers and the management being handled by the labor department, he stressed.

"I don't see any reason why they should disrupt operations at the pier," Cruz said.

The PPA official also said the agency's personnel would continue securing the area for as long as the operations are ongoing.

Red, for his part, said the workers' strike was not illegal because the workers had served a notice to management on Nov. 25.

What was illegal was the dispersal because it was not supported by an order from the labor department, he added.

Laxity in security eyed in deadly PNP gunplay

By Christian V. Esguerra

LAX SECURITY, again?

Philippine National Police Director General Edgar Aglipay formed yesterday a six-man committee to look into Monday's deadly shooting incident in Camp Crame involving an alleged Abu Sayyaf member and policemen.

But even before the committee could complete its findings, the PNP leadership seemed to be already pinning the blame on PO1 Rolando Nolasco, the police escort shot and killed by alleged terrorist Allan Borlagdatan.

Borlagdatan was arrested for illegal possession of a firearm on Monday afternoon on Paso de Blas, Valenzuela City.

He was the prime suspect in the failed bombing of a G Liner passenger bus in Quiapo, Manila, on Christmas Eve.

Though the suspect was handcuffed while being shown to a detention cell at the Intelligence Group compound, his hands were in front of him, Aglipay said in a press conference yesterday, citing an initial report.

This enabled Borlagdatan to grab Nolasco's pistol as soon as the officer turned his back to open the cell, the official said.

"That was an individual mistake that we want to correct," Aglipay said. "Let that serve as a warning to all policemen. You might be next."

Aglipay was referring to officers who fail to handcuff suspects behind their backs, a standard procedure during arrests.

The police chief later said it was the slain officer's judgment call to relax the procedure.

Borlagdatan managed to shoot Nolasco five times before two other escorts, PO2 Noriel Meman and a certain SPO1 Malabuyo, shot the suspect dead. Borlagdatan had gunshot wounds in the ear and mouth.

Aglipay gave the committee a week to complete its investigation and make recommendations to prevent a repeat of the incident. The committee is headed by Chief Supt. Doroteo Reyes, PNP director for intelligence and detective management.

The PNP had supposedly made key adjustments at the IG compound soon after alleged Indonesian terrorist Fathur Rohman al-Ghozi and two Abu Sayyaf detainees walked out of the maximum security facility in 2003.

However, IG officials apparently failed to consider that suspects could try to grab an officer's gun in a desperate attempt to escape.

"Because we respect the rights of the accused, sometimes people become so considerate," Aglipay explained.

Prior to the escape of Al-Ghozi, another high-profile suspect, alleged Pentagon kidnap gang leader Faisal Marohombsar, also escaped detention from Camp Crame.

By the PNP's reckoning, the 26-year-old Borlagdatan alias Abdulhakim was no ordinary detainee.

Apart from last Friday's foiled bombing in Manila, the Philippine National Police claimed that Borlagdatan was also arrested for illegal possession of firearms and explosives during a raid in Anda, Pangasinan, on May 2, 2002.

In spite of these, Borlagdatan's uncle, July Nastor, yesterday said the slain suspect could not have been a terrorist.

Nastor said Borlagdatan was a full-time criminology student who had also worked at a publishing house in Caloocan.

He went to Manila from his home province of Cotabato to spend the holidays with his relatives in Valenzuela, said Eufemia Nastor, his grandmother.

MUNTI MAKES HISTORY
Muntinlupa City Mayor Jaime R. Fresnedi (second from right) signs a personal copy of the book Kasaysayan ng Muntinlupa for Press Secretary Ignacio R. Bunye (right) during the launch on Dec. 19 of the first book on the history of the city. The book, a joint collaboration between author Ma. Luisa T. Camagay, Ph. D., (left) and the city government, is part of Fresnedi's Eight-Point Program of Governance. Standing behind Fresnedi and Bunye is former Vice Mayor Jojay T. Alcaraz.

Metro's vital spots under tight watch

**By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.
and Leila B. Salaverria**

POLICEMEN in the metropolis will be under full alert status starting tomorrow, the fourth anniversary of the bloody Dec. 30 bombings in Metro Manila.

On Dec. 30, 2000, several bombs went off in different areas in the metropolis, including a train on the LRT Blumentritt Station and a passenger bus in Cubao, Quezon City. At least 22 were killed, while more than 100 were injured in the incidents.

Under the full alert status, policemen are not allowed to go on leave. Approved leave forms would also be recalled.

Though the police have monitored "no direct threats," National Capital Region Police Office Director Avelino Razon Jr. told the INQUIRER measures were in place "to deter the plans, if ever, of criminal groups."

Police are also keeping a close watch on vital installations like the LRT stations, the US Embassy, Malacañang Palace, the Pandacan Oil Depot, shopping malls and public parks.

The NCRPO raised its alert level from normal to heightened status today. Tomorrow, this will be raised to full alert.

Razon said this meant increased police visibility, like checkpoints to be set up in the city.

Teams would be deployed in bus terminals, the Metro Rail Transit and Light Railway Transit stations, seaports and airports.

The policemen are not taking any chances.

A package left outside the Supreme Court building in Manila yesterday sent explosives and ordnance experts of the Western Police District scrambling to neutralize the "threat."

The package, however, only contained a roll of foam wrapped in a canvas sheet, according to PO2 Michael Dingding of the Sta. Monica precinct.

The package was found at 3:30 p.m. yesterday along Taft Avenue, between the Supreme Court Building and the National Bureau of Investigation offices in Ermita.

Bystanders told police about the package, and a bomb disposal unit was called to check its contents.

Manila policemen had been told to intensify security measures following the discovery on Dec. 24 of a bag with an improvised bomb inside a Cainta-bound bus in Quiapo. The bag was found by a bus driver.

Makati to close 2 roads

By Margaux C. Ortiz

TWO KEY roads in Makati City will be closed for two days beginning tomorrow to give way to preparations for the city's New Year's Eve countdown.

Paseo de Roxas and Ayala Avenue will be closed to motorists beginning 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 30 up to 9 a.m. on Jan. 1, said Joselito Salgado, chief of the Makati Information and Community Relations Department.

Private motorists are advised to use Makati Avenue, Dela Rosa Street and Gil Puyat Avenue as an alternative route.

Public utility vehicles are also advised to use either Gil Puyat or Makati Avenue.

On New Year's Eve, revelers with cars may use designated parking areas near the corners of Paseo and Ayala, where the countdown will be held.

Public parking

Makati Public Safety Director Herminigildo San Miguel identified the designated public parking areas as Dela Rosa Street, the corner of Paseo de Roxas and Makati Avenue, and Valero Street near Sedeño.

San Miguel also said around 700 police, medical, traffic and public safety personnel would be deployed on Dec. 31.

He added that the city would tap additional policemen from the Southern Police District and the National Capital Region Police Command to boost security at the revelry site.

The new Makati Acute Care Center will also be opened on New Year's Eve to cater to emergency cases.

The Makati New Year's countdown will feature a special 15-minute fireworks display prepared by an international team of experts, a laser light show and a rock concert.

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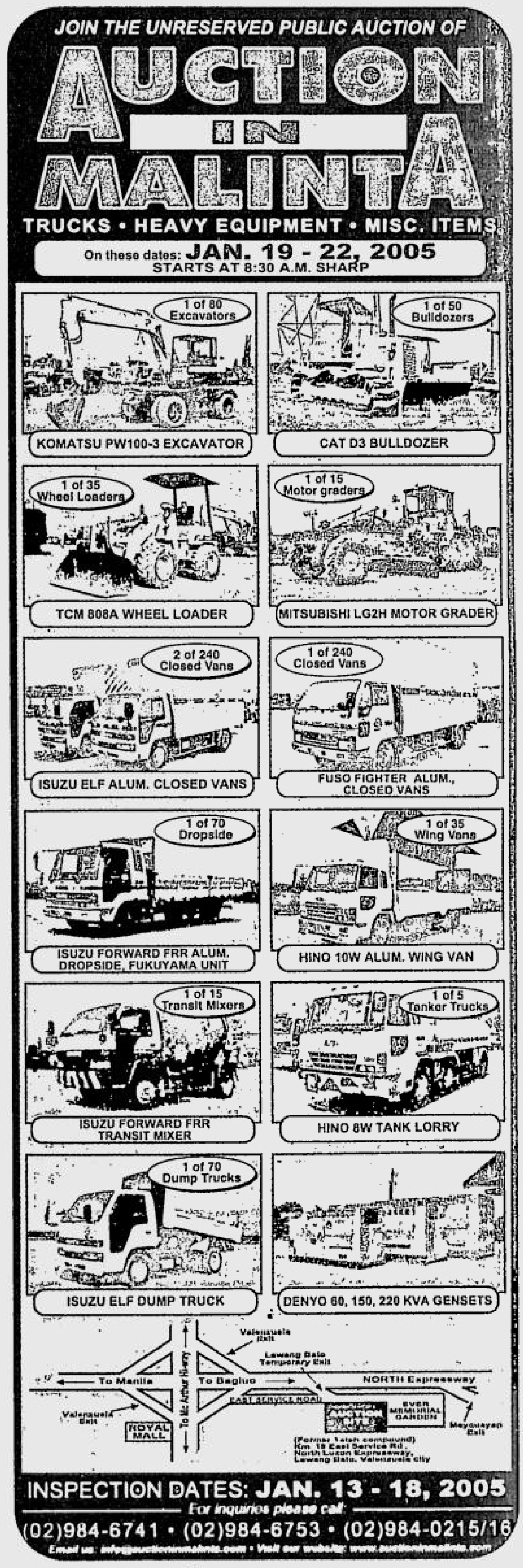

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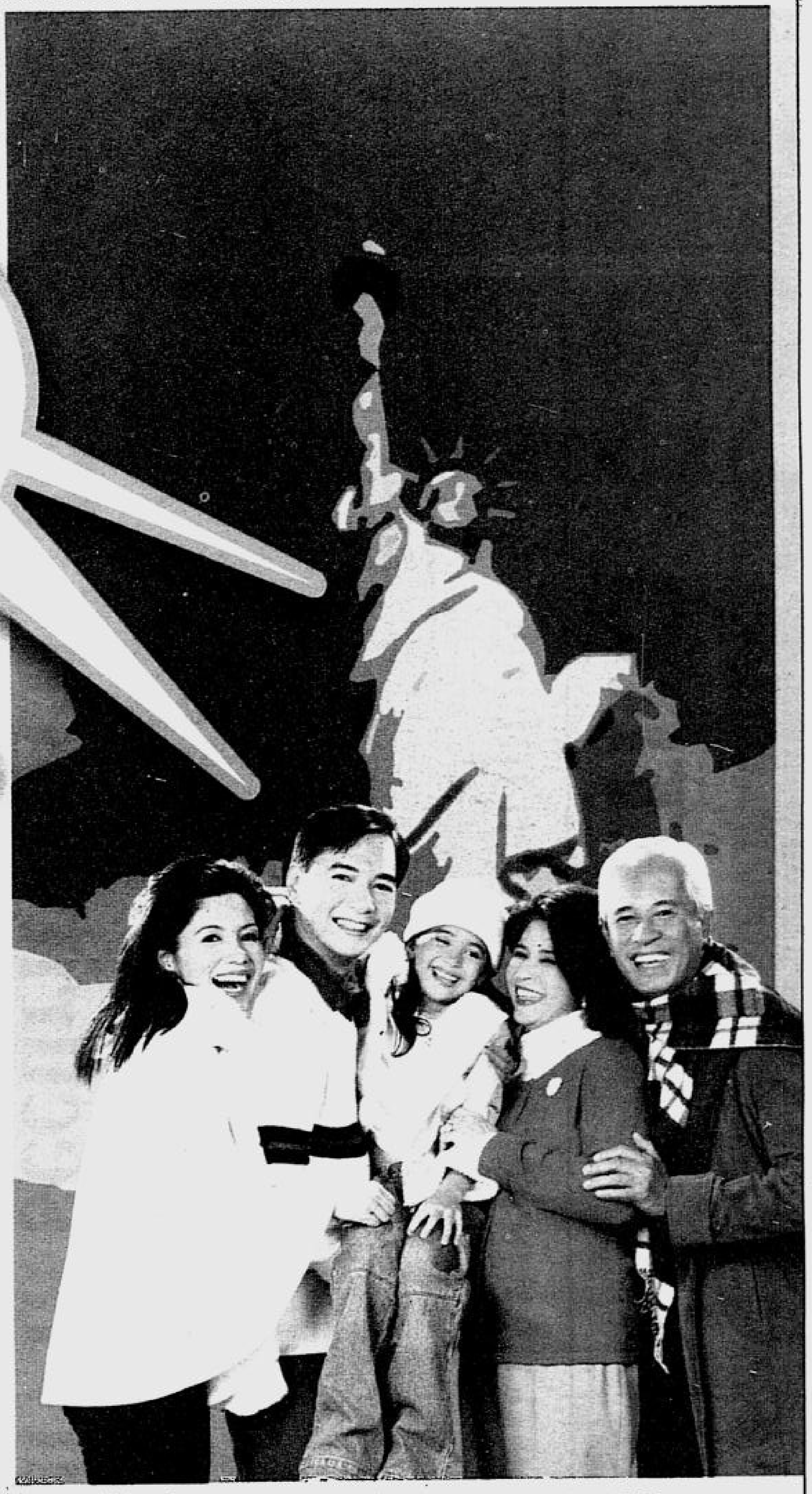

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Compiled by L. Manguiat

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Eala picks coach of RP quintet

But PBA commish defers announcement pending governors' meeting

By Jasmine W. Payo

THE WAITING game isn't exactly over.

The national team coach has been chosen but PBA commissioner Noli Eala yesterday decided to keep the announcement under wraps.

"I already made the selection, and in fact, I'm ready for my proposal," said Eala after resetting the official announcement to Jan. 4, 2005. "I cannot say it right now because I can't preempt the board."

BANAL

Eala was scheduled to present his recommendation to the league's board of governors today. However, two board members cannot make it to the special meeting.

"Chairman Buddy Encarnado requested that when I'm ready to make the announcement, all members of the board should be there," said Eala.

REYES

In the past weeks, aspirants Joel Banal of Talk 'N Text, Yeng Guiao of Red Bull Barako, Chot Reyes of Coca-Cola and Tim Cone of Alaska submitted written programs on how they intend to run the national team for the next four years. They later presented their proposals in a panel interview.

Eala said he has the perfect man for the job.

CONE

"He has the experience," said the commissioner. "He has a clear vision on what to do in the next four years. He has a very comprehensive program and is very detailed on it."

Eala added that the coach's "dynamic" personality was another factor.

GUIAO

"He will be working with a lot of superstars and I'm sure his personality will be accepted by all the players," he said.

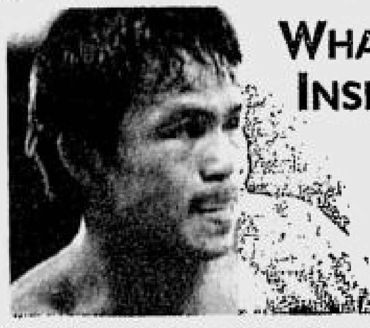
Eala said his pick shows total "dedication to the (RP) team."

"He's very particular on what part of his program should be prioritized because this is a four-year program and we need patience here," Eala explained. "And he said he is ready for the adjustment."

According to Eala, the national team coach will be given full authority to select his players. The coach will also choose the members of the team vying for a slot in the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Eala revealed that he sought advice from former commissioners Rudy Salud and Jun Bernardino and expressed confidence that his recommendation will be approved by the board.

Also included in the agenda of the next board meeting are discussions on team funding and the support of the national coach's mother ballclub.



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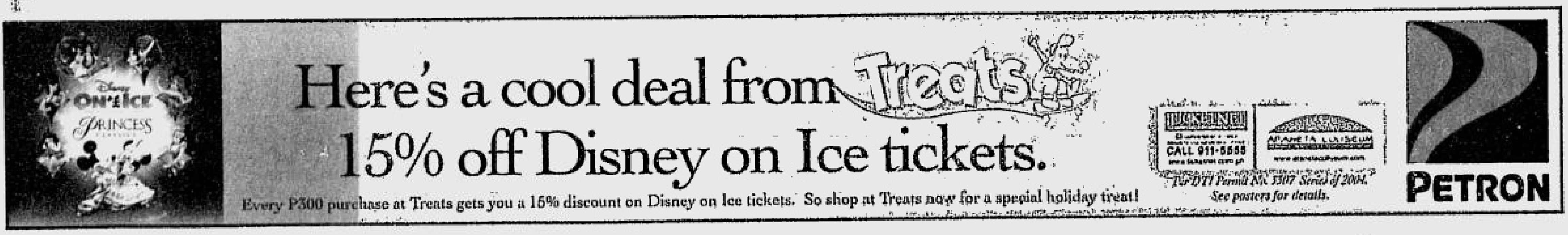

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PETRON

President meets with Philsoc Jan. 3

By Marc Anthony Reyes

PRESIDENT Arroyo will meet with members of the Philippine Southeast Asian Games Organizing Committee on Jan. 3 to look at proposals the Philsoc will present to two big private firms and government institutions interested in bankrolling the biennial games next year.

Philsoc executive and Bacolod Rep. Monico Puentevella said yesterday only the approval of the President is needed before they make the formal presentation to the prospective sponsors which he refused to name.

"All we need now is the go-signal from the President," Puentevella told the INQUIRER. "Hopefully, we can get it on Jan. 3 when we are scheduled to see her.

"For the past three months, we have been working on a package deal with two big non-government firms and (Philsoc) has had talks with the concerned government financial officers to get their endorsements."

Puentevella was reacting to reports that the Philsoc has not figured out where to get the funds—estimated at between P800 million and P1 billion—to hold the Games.

The congressman declined to identify the government firms they are eyeing as major sponsors for the event, slated Nov. 27 to Dec. 5, until the deal is sealed.

The Jan. 3 meeting will be the first between the President and the organizing committee since the middle of this year, when she issued marching orders for all-out preparations for the Games.

Puentevella said the President's endorsement could pave the way for an outpouring of support from the private sector. The SEAG hosting will require repairs on most venues in Manila, Subic, Cebu and Bacolod.

UAAP WARS

UST, La Salle share honors

SANTO TOMAS and La Salle pulled off the biggest achievements in another banner UAAP season in 2004.

The Tigers won last year's general championship and the Archers claimed the most coveted crown of all, holding off Far Eastern in a classic duel for the senior basketball crown.

La Salle was also awesome in women's volleyball, winning the title with a 14-game sweep.

A new coaching rivalry between brothers Dindo and Franz Pumaren developed and injuries to Larry Fonacier of Ateneo and Ramil Tagupa of Adamson also made it as sidelights.

Franz was television's choice as the year's best coach, but Dindo was cited by the print media for working wonders for UE.

Arwind Santos, FEU's heart and soul, earned consolation for the Tamaraws by being named MVP in men's basketball.

La Salle also ruled men's chess and women's table tennis while UST triumphed in women's swimming and men's table tennis.

University of the Philippines sank the opposition in men's swimming and topped women's chess with FEU dominating men's volleyball and Adamson women's basketball.

Long-time sponsors help fete top athletes

AS IN the past, a long-time partner of the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) will lend a hand when the country's oldest media group holds its Annual Awards Night at the Manila Pavilion on Jan. 13.

Red Bull and Agfa Colors, through mother company Photokina, are again collaborating with the sportswriting fraternity as it fetes the top achievers of 2004 led by Jennifer Rosales and Manny Pacquiao, the recipient of the Sportswoman and Sportsman of the Year awards, respectively.

Also a major sponsor of the weekly PSA Forum, Red Bull has been a perennial backer of the 90-member association the past 11 years now.

"It's always been a great honor to be partners with the PSA, especially in a big occasion honoring the Filipino athletes who made the country proud last year," said Photokina owner and sports patron George Chua.

NBN-4, also a major supporter of the PSA, will air the 90-minute program sponsored by Pagcor, San Miguel Beer, the Philippine Sports Commission, Accel and Manila Mayor Lito Atienza.

The 26-year-old Rosales is a first-time recipient of the highest accolade given by the sports body, thanks to her breakthrough victory in the tough LPGA Tour. She ruled the $1.6 million Chick-Fil-A Championship in Stockbridge, Georgia, besting the likes of world No. 1 player Annika Sorenstam, Meg Mallon, Rachel Teske, Grace Park and Se Ri Pak.

Pacquiao, also 26, became only the second athlete to receive the award three straight times after bowler Bong Coo (1982-84). He was the PSA Sportsman of the Year in 2002 and 2003.

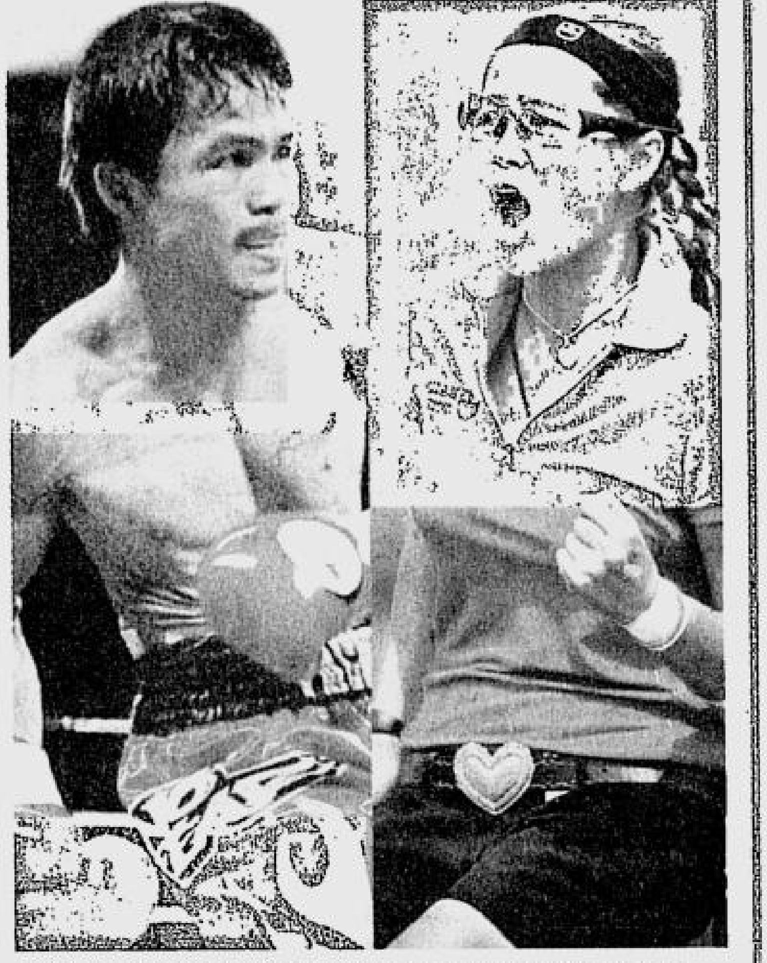
He did it again this year after holding World Boxing Association and International Boxing Federation featherweight champion Juan Manuel Marquez to a highly disputed split draw during their action-packed 12-round title bout at the MGM Grand Arena in Las Vegas.

The Filipino ring idol knocked Marquez thrice in the opening round in a blazing start, but failed to finish off his tough Mexican foe, who salvaged the draw after one of the fight judges made a big blunder in scoring.

A day after the bout, Burt Clemens of New Jersey admitted having erred in scoring the crucial first round 10-7, instead of 10-6. The costly error robbed Pacquiao of a victory by split decision.

The pride and joy of General Santos City later knocked out Fahsan 3K Battery of Thailand in the fourth round of their non-title bout at The Fort. The win paved the way for Pacquiao's much-awaited rematch with Marquez on Feb. 26.

With Pacquiao and Rosales on the honor roll are PSA Special Awards recipients Alex Pagulayan, the World Pool champion, and Olympians Mary Antoinette Rivero (taekwondo) and Jasmine Figueroa (archery).



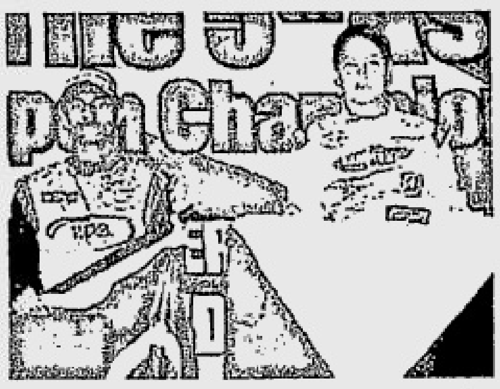
TOASTS OF 2004: Manny Pacquiao (left) and Jennifer Rosales

Four-time PBA Most Valuable Player Alvin Patrimonio will be honored with the Presidential Award for his contribution to local basketball. The 38-year-old former Mapua stalwart retired from the pro league last month after a colorful, 17-year career.

Chess masters Mark Paragua and Nelson Mariano lead the major awardees along with Liza del Rosario (bowling), Francisco "Django" Bustamante and Efren "Bata" Reyes (billiards), Rhyan Tanguilig (cycling), Gabriel Espinas (amateur basketball), Angelo Que (golf) and Pati Dilema (horse racing).

Bumgarner bags Asian karting title

SENTUL, Indonesia—Michelle Bumgarner captured the Formula-A Open crown of the 2004 Asian Zone Open karting championship despite spinning out of her final race with three laps left.



BUMGARNER (right) displays the RP flag. At left is runner-up Imran Zaharias of Malaysia.

The 16-year-old Filipina-American, who trains under former world champion Terry Fullerton, already clinched the championship prior to the final race at the Sentul track here for having earned enough points in the previous legs.

"This is my Christmas gift to my country," said Bumgarner, who will be feted by the Philippine Sportswriters Association with a citation during its Awards Night on Jan. 13 at the Manila Pavilion.

It was Bumgarner's maiden race in the Formula-A Open after clinching the title in the Junior Intercontinental-A class in 2002 and 2003.

Michelle swept the first three rounds held in Malaysia, Philippines and India. She finished third in the fourth round in Macau despite engine problems.

The team did not have enough time to set up the kart for the wet conditions in the Sentul race.

Indonesian Zahir Ali stayed unbeaten at his home track by winning the final race. He wound up third overall, just behind Malaysian Imran Zaharias.

The Asian title capped Bumgarner's impressive campaign this year. Before the Asian Open championship leg, the daughter of an American businessman and a Zambalena also competed in a prestigious race in Suzuka, Japan.

Bumgarner, backed by Samsung, Standard Insurance and Oakley, is expected to race in the Formula BMW Series and the European karting circuit next year.

Big cash prizes lure top triathlon racers

NO LESS than the biggest prizes in local triathlon will be at stake when Bayawan City in Negros Oriental hosts the National Triathlon Championships on Jan. 30.

Organizers have put up P700,000 in cash and other prizes in the championships that will kick off the busy schedule of activities of the Triathlon Association of the Philippines (TRAP) for 2005.

The fast-growing city of Bayawan has lured the country's finest triathlon racers with P280,000 in cash prizes. On top of this, TRAP is staking P210,000 as cash incentives for the winners.

The two-in-one event, which also includes the National Inter-Club competition, is also dangling about P210,000 worth of other prizes for the top finishers.

Local triathlon's long-time backer Speedo will also provide product giveaways to the winners.

"We want to make sure that the participants will receive attractive cash prizes," said Bayawan Mayor German Sarana, who counts on the support of the City Council led by Vice Mayor Rene Gaudiel.

The Council has allocated about P800,000 for hosting the event.

The overall champion in the NTC in both the men's and women's divisions will get P25,000 with the runners-up pocketing P15,000 and P10,000, respectively.

The top three male and female finishers in the Under 23 category will get P10,000, P5,000, and P25,000, respectively. The top three in the 11 age groups will win P3,000, P2,000, and P1,000, respectively.

Pacquiao: No choice but play catch-up

BARE EYE

Recah Trinidad

MANNY Pacquiao is indeed a great man in a hurry.

The knockout artist from GenSan wants to feast on his ring opponents fast.

The finest living Filipino boxer loves to start out like a fireball.

He grabs hard at his foes, then wails at them with tidal wave ferocity.

Of course, the world boxing celebrity also tends to drag his feet outside the boxing ring.

He could also be as lazy, languorous as a cool summer breeze.

He drowns in harvest-time merriment and often takes long to decide.

Take, for example, his departure for training in the United States.

Instead of Jan. 5, Pacquiao now says he's leaving Jan. 8 to link up with trainer Freddie Roach at the Wild Card Boxing Club in Hollywood.

This despite Roach's advice for him to leave for LA immediately after Christmas Day.

***

Time is of the essence in his preparation against the Juan Manuel Marquez.

But Pacquiao is not one to send his legion of fans worrying.

As in past bouts, Pacquiao would again vow to be at peak form come his Feb. 26 rematch against the fabulous Mexican counter-puncher who had taught him a thing or two in their first fight in Las Vegas last May.

Other than foot-drag, Pacquiao also loves to cut corners and cram.

He only had three weeks to prepare for his last fight in Taguig City.

He had a tight, awkward start against Fahsan 3K Battery.

But Pacquiao nevertheless went on to nail down the Thai three times, before crushing him into fragments with a body-lifting left upper-slice in the fourth round.

***

Naturally, what had singularly surfaced to most fans, mainly the thrilled television enthusiasts, was Pacquiao's might.

Sorry, but most of those who saw that fight did not notice how Pacquiao had to gasp for breath come the third round.

Thank God it did not happen, because it would have been a disaster if the fight had, say, gone past six rounds.

With his insufficient preparation, Pacquiao would have run out of gas.

His could've softened and fizzled out.

He would have been reduced to a foamy, willing target.

***

At least, Pacquiao would later admit that, contrary to his pre-fight vow, he was not a hundred percent against the overmatched Thai brawler.

Well, he could have stopped 3K Battery fighting only with one hand.

Unfortunately, Pacquiao appeared unable to read the message in his last fight.

The warning was loud and clear: He cannot afford to cram against Marquez.

Of course, Pacquiao was quick to assure everybody that he's keeping his weight in check.

That's as good as saying he would not stray off the championship path while he enjoys the holidays to their final minutes here in the Philippines.

***

Meanwhile, Marquez, described as a fitness freak, is deep into what could be his second month of intensive, high-altitude training in Mexico.

Given a week or 10-day notice, Marquez should be ready and willing to rumble against Pacquiao or any challenger to his WBA/IBF crown.

Well, as Pacquiao will be reporting late to the Wild Card Boxing Club, it cannot be denied that he will have to play catch-up.

He will have to again work doubly hard, fast.

He will have to run longer, bang at the heavy bags harder in extended sessions.

Pacquiao had known how hard it was to rush and cut corners on the way to big fights.

This malpractice is the greatest invitation to disaster.

Or does the Pinoy raging bull love to play catch-up and fight at a handicap?

SPORTSWATCH

Quitara, Patrimonio gain Milo net semis

MALAYSIAN junior circuit revelation Zhane Quitara blanked July Aveloza, 6-0, 6-0, and Christine Patrimonio matched that scoreline with a victory over Erenielle Soriano as both advanced to the semifinals in the girls' 14-under division yesterday in the 2004 Milo Junior Tennis Cup at the Philam Homes Tennis Club courts in Quezon City. Quitara, who topped the Penang and Perlis legs of the recent Malaysia Junior Tennis Circuit, and Patrimonio joined Irina Quinatadcan and Regina Santiago in the final four. Quinatadcan downed JV Custodio, 6-4, 6-0, while Santiago ousted Mara Sotto, 6-3, 6-0. In the boys' 12-under bracket of the year-ender Milo netfest organized by CTW and supported by adidas, Christian Lee routed Enrique Ferrer, 6-1, 6-2; Jose Lorenzo Ferrer walked over Kurt Cristobal; Arjohn dela Cruz outlasted Kevin Mamawal, 2-6, 6-4, 6-2; and Dheo Talatayod whipped Jason Lee 6-2, 6-1. In the boys' 16-under play, Niko katigbak downed John Quinatacdan, 6-0, 6-1, to advance to the next round with Carlos Espedido, who blasted Homer Perez, 6-2, 6-3. In other results, Angelo Patrimonio outplayed Justine Echague, 6-2, 6-1; Kim Saraza overpowered Gerald Ngo, 7-5, 6-3; Leyan Moncera beat Jose Opulencia, 6-1, 7-5; Patrick Arevalo whipped Jopy Mamawal, 6-1, 6-1; and Juan Carlo Pantua downed Vincent Atienza, 6-3, 6-4.

Sinangote formalizes MCC chess victory

WITH THE title tucked safely under his belt with still a round left, Julius Sinangote of Caloocan City drew his final match with Marikina's Macapagal "Macky" Paquital Monday to rule the Metropolitan Chess Club (MCC) non-master active chess tournament and win the top purse of P4,000. John Mark Puerto of Los Baños, Laguna, finished solo second with 6.0 points to take the runner-up prize of P2,000. Paquital wound up with 5.5 points and shared third to fifth places with five-time national executive champion Dr. Jenny Mayor of Romblon and Ritchie Evangelista of Bolinao, Pangasinan. They pocketed P1,000 each. Meanwhile, Primanila Plans Inc. has put up the top prizes for the MCC.Executive Category I & 2 active chess tournament which gets under way at 1 p.m. on Dec. 30 at the MCC headquarters at the J&F Divino Building near LRT 2 Anonas Station in Quezon City. For inquiries, call MCC at 435-8412 or 0916-852-1069. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

Andrada Cup sets listing deadline

REGISTRATION for the 16th Andrada Cup age-group tennis championships, a Group 2 tournament, will end on Friday at noon. Entries for the event, slated Jan. 3 to 9 at the Ynares Socio-Cultural Sports Center in Pasig City, are accepted at the Philippine Tennis Association (Philta) office at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex and at the Asian Sports Management Inc. (ASMI) office at the Ynares Center. Events on tap are the boys' and girls' 18 years and under, 16 and under, 14 and under and 12 and under and unisex 10 years and under singles. Registration fee is P200 per event and the draw will be held at 2 p.m. tomorrow.

Young Paraguas head Marilao tilt entries

ADRIAN Bob Paragua and six-year-old sister Gem Hanna Paragua head the cast in the first Mayor Epifanio V. Guillermo Chess Festival 2050-below and Kiddies Tournament which unfolds on Dec. 30 at the Entertainment Plaza of SM City in Marilao, Bulacan. Expected to attend the opening ceremonies is Singapore Open co-champion and Marilao resident GM-candidate Mark Paragua. Cash prizes and trophies are at stake in the three-division tournament. Consolation prizes will also be awarded to the top two finishers in their respective categories. For inquiries, call the All Bulacan Chess Federation and look for Richard Evangelista at 0918-636-2147 or Jan Vincent at (044) 720-6783. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

Noche Buena derby final round today

BUSY cockfighting action welcomes the Year of the Rooster at 2 p.m. today when the championship round of the Noche Buena 5-Cock Derby gets under way at the Roligon Mega Cockpit. Last Monday's elimination battles produced 11 two-pointers. They are Mangzee Game Farm II of Bobby del Rosario, Superwings Sundance of Rep. Ronnie Puno, BG Conrad Dec. 28 sa Elorde, Ju Lista Na of James Uy, Dangerous 939 sa Pasay of Lito Alcantara, Wiston Jed of William Go, RAU of Yando Bayot, Red Star of Gerry Garovillas, Rumble 4-Cock of Freco Reyes, Gold Rich of lawyer Art de Castro and Happy New Year of Allan Siaco. They shared the P100,000 day-champion prize. The fastest-kill winner among the victors in his last fight will get P50,000 with the second placer receiving P30,000 and the third placer P20,000. Hosted by Rolly Ligon and sponsored by Thunderbird Power Feeds, the derby stakes a guaranteed cash prize of P1 million. Thirty more entries fielding five roosters each join tonight's fray. Among the entries are lawyer Carlos, Col. Catiis, Benjie Lim, Alex and Pol Derpo, Alex Wallcott, Dong Lacson, Roger Lahaylahay, Erwin Diamante, Rey Briones, Benny Lado, Charlie Cristobal, Virgilio and Jun Manguerra, Col. Tabique, Dado Mitra, Boy Marzo, Peter Uren, Abraham Bernales, Nelson Uy and Col. Tabique.

Pistons trounce Nets; Heat continue to sizzle

NEW YORK—Richard Hamilton scored 37 points as the Detroit Pistons outscored the New Jersey Nets, 13-3, in overtime, leading the Pistons to a 100-90 win in Auburn Hills on Monday.

Tayshaun Prince added 18 points, nine rebounds and seven assists for the Pistons, who spoiled the debut of Vince Carter in a Nets uniform.

Carter scored 23 points in 42 minutes for the Nets in his first game in three weeks due to an Achilles injury, which he suffered at The Palace while playing for the Toronto Raptors.

Despite hobbling off during overtime with a left hamstring problem, he said he did not believe the latest injury would cause him to miss any games.

Richard Jefferson scored 27 points to lead the Nets and also had seven rebounds, but Jason Kidd went 0-for-8 from the field and scored just two points in 36 minutes as he continues to rebound from off-season knee surgery.

Nenad Krstic had 13 points and nine rebounds for the Nets.

Chauncey Billups had 13 points and nine assists for the Pistons, who got 18 rebounds and eight points from Ben Wallace.

In other NBA games, Shaquille O'Neal scored 31 points despite playing with sore ribs as Miami Heat set a franchise record with their 12th consecutive triumph, a 116-102 victory over the Atlanta Hawks.

O'Neal played with padding to protect his ribs. Dwyane Wade added 27 points for Miami.

Antoine Walker, Tony Delk and Predrag Drobnjak all scored 16 points for the Hawks, losers of six of their last seven games.

In Orlando, Stephon Marbury had 34 points and seven assists to guide the New York Knicks to a 119-111 win over the Magic.

Kurt Thomas, Allan Houston and Jerome Williams all added 15 points for the Knicks, who set a season-high in points.

Steve Francis had 25 points and Cuttino Mobley added 24 for Orlando.

In Indianapolis, Reggie Miller contributed 24 points towards the Indiana Pacers 100-82 victory over the struggling New Orleans Hornets.

Jermaine O'Neal added 16 points and 11 rebounds in just his second game back from suspension for the Pacers.

Lee Nailon scored 28 points but could not prevent the Hornets (2-25) from suffering their sixth straight defeat.

In Washington, Larry Hughes scored 20 points as the Wizards beat the Charlotte Bobcats, 106-87.

Gilbert Arenas added 17 points for the Wizards, who shot a season-high 54.8 percent from the field.

Emeka Okafor scored 18 points and had 11 rebounds for the Bobcats, his 16th consecutive double-double.

In Memphis, Pau Gasol had 24 points and eight rebounds as the Grizzlies stopped the Los Angeles Clippers, 96-76.

Bonzi Wells had 18 points for the Grizzlies. Corey Maggette had 14 points to lead the Clippers.

In Salt Lake City, Rashard Lewis scored 22 points and Ray Allen had 19 as the Seattle SuperSonics beat the Utah Jazz, 98-88.

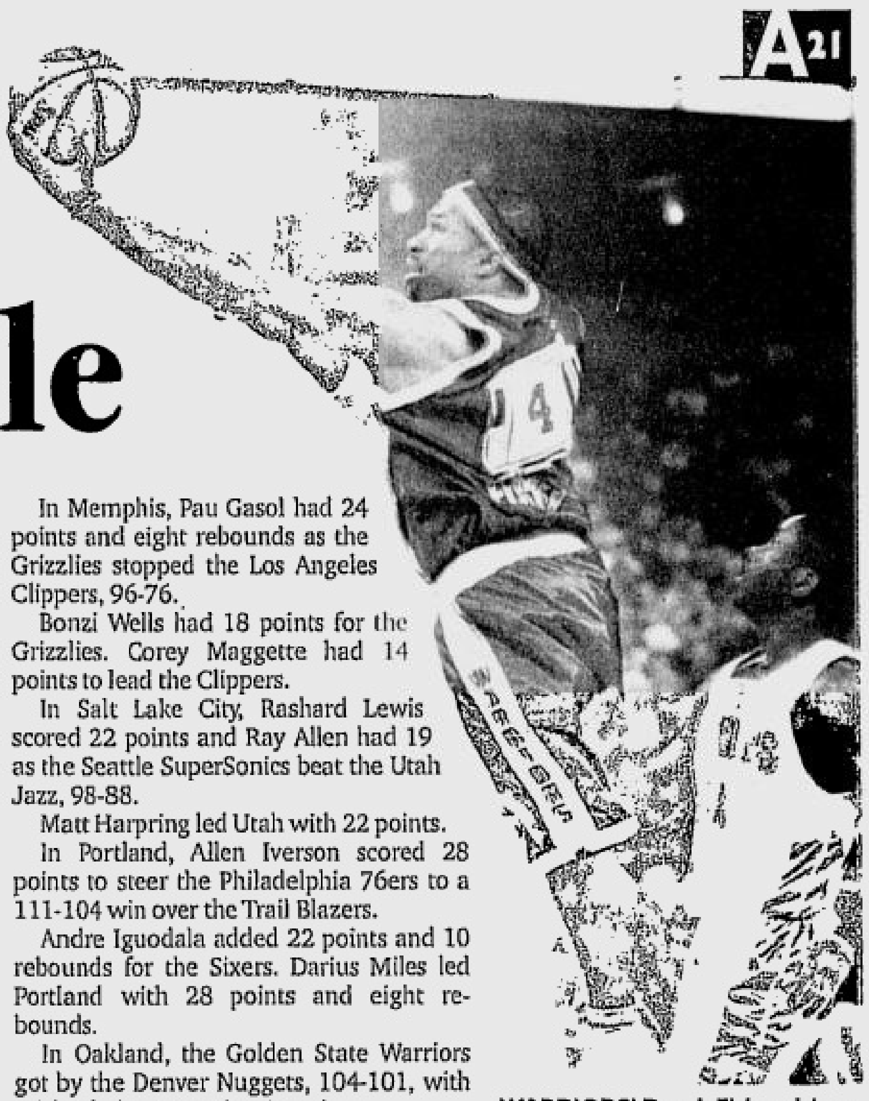
Matt Harpring led Utah with 22 points.

In Portland, Allen Iverson scored 28 points to steer the Philadelphia 76ers to a 111-104 win over the Trail Blazers.

Andre Iguodala added 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Sixers. Darius Miles led Portland with 28 points and eight rebounds.

In Oakland, the Golden State Warriors got by the Denver Nuggets, 104-101, with Mickael Pietrus scoring 24 points.

Andre Miller led Denver with 21 points and 14 assists. *Reuters*



WARRIORS' Derek Fisher drives to the basket as Nuggets' Earl Boykins looks on. AP

Trail Blazers sign 7-foot-3 Korean

PORTLAND, Oregon—The Portland Trail Blazers on Monday made Ha Seung-Jin the National Basketball Association's first South Korean signing, but immediately placed the 19-year-old center on the injured list with lower back pain.

To fill Ha's spot on the roster, Portland activated guard Richie Frahm, who had been on the injured list with a right foot injury since November 10.

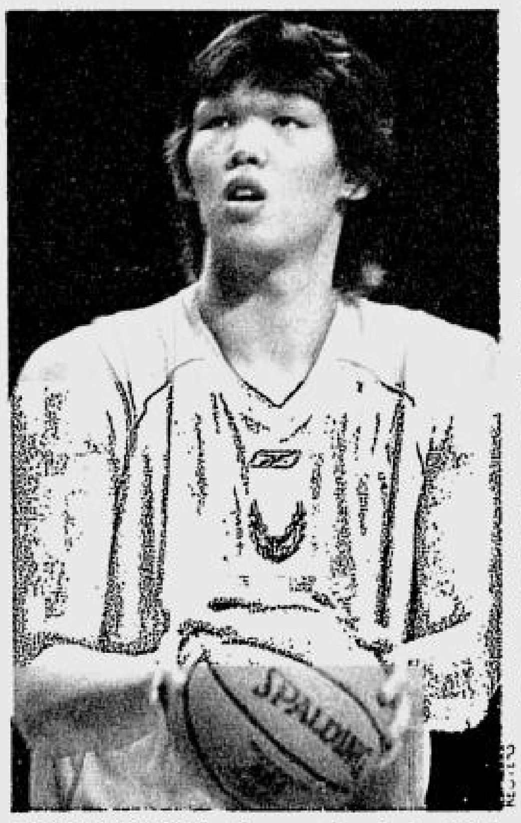
The Trail Blazers selected the 7-foot-3-inch center 46th overall in the 2004 draft. He had been playing with the Portland Reign of the American Basketball Association.

"We are pleased that Seung-Jin has played effectively in the ABA," Blazers general manager John Nash said. "And we feel that he would benefit from working with our coaches on a daily basis."

Ha, the son of former Korean national team player Ki Dong, did not play competitive basketball during the 2003-04 season while preparing for the draft.

He had been a star at Samil Commercial High School before averaging 12.6 points, 8/6 rebounds and 1.6 blocks to help Yonsei University capture a Korean national title.

The signing of Ha is the latest move that extends the NBA into Asia. China'S Yao Ming was drafted first overall by the Houston Rockets in 2002 and Yutá Tabuse became the first Japanese in the league when he signed with the Phoenix Suns earlier in the season. *AFP*



HA SEUNG-JIN: First Korean player in the NBA

7-meter waves force 42 boats out of race

SYDNEY—The crew of Australian super maxi Skandia took to life rafts on Tuesday while rival New Zealand yacht Konica Minolta was also forced out of the Sydney-Hobart race in rough weather that has claimed a third of the fleet.

Konica Minolta and Skandia had led the annual 630-nautical mile bluewater classic since Sunday's start but both suffered structural damage during the night in Bass Strait between the Australian mainland and the southern island state of Tasmania.

Meteorologists issued a gale warning for eastern Tasmania on Tuesday, while 42 boats out of a starting fleeting of 116 have already retired.

Stewart Thwaites's Konica Minolta had gradually increased its lead over 2003 winner Skandia but suffered unspecified damage as thunderstorms, strong southwesterly winds with squalls up to 50 knots and freezing conditions hit the fleet.

Skandia issued a distress call early on Tuesday when an hydraulic arm on its sophisticated moving keel became jammed and the boat was unable to hold a course.

With the keel jammed to starboard, owner Grant Wharington was unable to steer and the yacht wallowed helplessly in seas of up to seven meters (23 feet).

Skandia's 16 crew took to life rafts and were transferred to a Tasmanian police launch, race officials said. None of the crew was hurt.

Since Sunday's start, the two 30 meter (98 feet) super maxis had been engaged in a re-run of last year's race, which Skandia won by just 14 minutes after more than two days at sea.

The withdrawal of the two favorites left Australian maxi Nicorette in the lead with about 145 miles to go. Nicorette was expected to finish close to 1300 GMT on Tuesday. *Reuters*

ARMSTRONG: Six-time Tour de France titlist. AP

Lance 2004's finest athlete

AUSTIN, Texas—Even by his lofty standards, Lance Armstrong's return to the mountaintop in 2004 was pretty special.

The question now facing Armstrong and his legion of fans is whether he'll return to challenge the Pyrenees and the French Alps again in 2005.

Already recognized as one of the truly inspiring athletes of his generation, Armstrong took his cycling legacy a step further when he won a record-breaking sixth consecutive Tour de France in July.

And for his accomplishment, he was honored Monday as The Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year for the third straight year.

Armstrong joined Michael Jordan (1991-93) as the only athletes selected by American sports writers and broadcasters three straight times since the honor was awarded in 1931.

Armstrong received 51 first-place votes and 312 total points. Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning was second with 17 first-place votes and 156 points. Armstrong has yet to commit to going for a seventh title next year. *AP*

Olympic stadium work on

BEIJING—Work resumed Tuesday on a new and cheaper version of Beijing's 80,000-seat National Stadium, a key Olympic construction project, a city official said.

"Workers were back on the construction site today," said the official, a staff member of the Beijing 2008 Project Construction Headquarters Office, a unit under the city government.

Plans to equip the stadium with an expensive retractable steel roof have now been scrapped, she said.

Construction of the stadium, nicknamed the "Bird's Nest" because of its giant lattice-work structure of irregularly angled metal girders, was abruptly halted in late July amid a general austerity drive.

The original design was billed at about 3.9 billion yuan (470 million dollars), while the re-design should cut costs to about 2.3 billion yuan, state media reported earlier. *AFP*

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Sixth weekly winners
Dec. 17 draw:
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Zamboanga Del Sur
2. Cedric Karl Michael Malig
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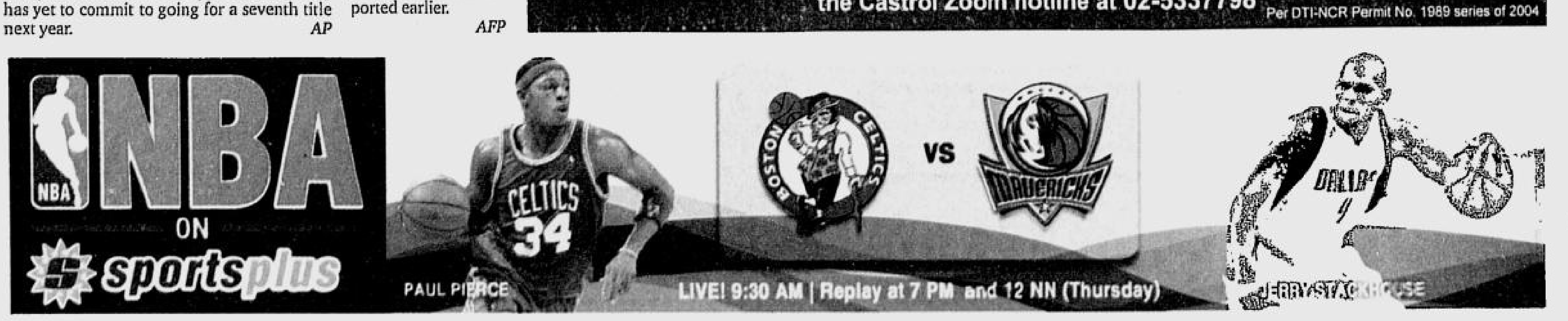

‘Indies are the industry’s...

From page A25

Tolentino, whom I directed in ‘Luksong Tinik,’ Maricel Soriano, whom I worked with so many times. Sharon Cuneta, Aga, I’d work with them any time.”

He thinks new directors like Quark Henares, Lav Diaz, Mark Meily, among others, should be encouraged in creating movies, not because of box-office potential but because these movies could jumpstart the stalled creativity of the industry.

“I wish they don’t get caught in a studio system where they merely become executioners of what the studio wants, rather than create the kind of films they really want to create,” Reyes said.

Hot pan de sal

“They should have producers who really understand filmmaking, but much of it is still a product of commerce. Right now, I’m looking at indies to be the only way to do that. You can’t help it if your filmmaking arm is part of a major entertainment corporation. You’re existing on the law of quotas, batting averages. So you can’t be as daring and as adventurous as an indie who’s a lover of film and at the same time a businessman.

“That is, I guess, the biggest problem of filmmaking now. Most of our producers are merely businessmen who quantify filmmaking as mere profit delivery and production costs without seeing the importance of risks.

“If there is a movie that becomes a hit, you can assume that more movies of the same would follow. It’s the hot pan de sal mentality of the industry. Nobody wants to venture into something new.”

Reyes has willingly cut his fee in order to direct a movie that “I really, really like.” He cuts his fee down to as much as 70 percent, depending on the producer and if the film is worth the sacrifice.

“There are so many dreams,” he said. “But at this point, either you do a film for the festival or you do a Valentine movie.”

More Asian films...

From page A23

ing a ghost, but the spirit that possesses her does more than asked, to the horror of the school’s entire student population.

Finally, “Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior” is a no-holds-barred action-thriller that could make martial artist **Tony Jaa** an international star. The film recalls kung-fu movies of the late ’60s and ’70s.

In Thailand, the film made over $7 million (or close to P400 million!).

In the movie, a sacred statuette of Buddha called Ong Bak is stolen, and Boonting (Jaa) is tasked to track the thief to Bangkok, and reclaim the prized religious icon. Along the way, Boonting must use his traditional Muay Thai skills to fight numerous adversaries.

Movies on TV

ON HBO, Dec. 29 at 2:30 p.m., “The Mirror Has Two Faces,” 9 p.m., “Catch Me If You Can.” Dec. 30 at 1:55 p.m., “Soapdish.” Dec. 31 at 1:05 p.m., “Minority Report.” 9 p.m., “The Matrix Reloaded.” 11:15 p.m., “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.”

On Cinemax, Dec. 29 at 9:15 a.m., “Fahrenheit 451.”

Dec. 30 at 6:45 p.m., “Black Hawk Down.” Dec. 31 at 9 a.m., “A Few Good Men.” 11:15 a.m., “To Sir, With Love.”

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2 SHARK TALE

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5 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER	5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
6 LASTIKMAN	6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS

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1 MANO PO 3	1 MANO PO 3
2 LASTIKMAN	2 LASTIKMAN
3 ENTENG KABISOTE	3 ENTENG KABISOTE
4 SIGAW	4 SIGAW
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
6 PANAGHOY SA SUBA	6 PANAGHOY SA SUBA

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THX 1 MANO PO 3	1 MANO PO 3	1 LASTIKMAN	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 1 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	1 HAPPY TOGETHER
2 ENTENG KABISOTE	2 ENTENG KABISOTE	2 AISHITE IMASU	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 2 MANO PO 3	2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 3 ENTENG KABISOTE	GUARANTEED SEATS 3 ENTENG KABISOTE	3 SIGAW
4 LASTIKMAN	4 HAPPY TOGETHER	4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA	GUARANTEED SEATS 4 AISHITE IMASU	4 LASTIKMAN
5 AISHITE IMASU		5 HAPPY TOGETHER	GUARANTEED SEATS 5 SIGAW	5 MANO PO 3
		6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS		
		7 SIGAW		

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GREENBELT 1
1 MANO PO 3
2 HAPPY TOGETHER

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More Asian films make it to Hollywood

THE US film industry has been conducting an off-and-on love affair with Asian movies and actors for many years.

For instance, among the many Japanese films that have been exhibited and praised in the United States are "Seven Samurai," "Ikiru," "The Throne of Blood," "The Lower Depths," "Yojimbo," "Red Beard," "Rickshaw Man," "Ballad of Narayama," "Ugetsu," "In the Realm of the Senses," "Early Summer," "Tokyo Story," "Woman in the Dunes," "Ran," "Akira Kurosawa's Dreams" and "Children of Hiroshima."

In the '70s, however, Japanese film production declined, so the west looked around for other Asian movie products, and found it coming from the nascent film industry of China. Combined with some movies coming from Taiwan and Hong Kong, these Chinese movies once again focused the attention of international film audiences on Asia.

Later, the films of Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, India and Cambodia also came to the fore, further enriching the West's perception of the cultural treasures of the east, as captured on celluloid.

This has intensified Hollywood's romance with Asian films, to such an extent that the new millennium has been predicted to usher in the eventual supremacy of Asian movies in world cinema.

A farfetched dream? Not after Ang Lee's mystical epic,

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," marked a milestone for being the first Asian film to reach the $100-million mark in North American theaters.

Before that, Asian films were screened mainly in art film houses. After "Crouching Tiger," however, major Hollywood studios started to wise up to Asian cinema's commercial viability.

Since then, it has been much easier for Asian movies to clinch distribution deals in North America. This has paved the way for the commercial US screening of such titles as Zhang Yimou's "Hero" and "House of Flying Daggers," Cory Yuen's "So Close" and "Time and Tide," and Takeshi Miike's "One Missed Call."

Now, three new Asian films have similarly found favor in Hollywood: Hong Kong's "Kung Fu Hustle," Korea's "Ouija Board: Bunshinsaba," and Thailand's "Ong Bak: The Thai Warrior."

The first title will be released worldwide by Columbia, while the next two will be distributed by Buena Vista International.

"Kung Fu Hustle" is a special effects-packed action-comedy production starring Stephen Chow. It is the much-anticipated follow-up to his 2001 hit, "Shaolin Soccer," which broke box-office records across the region.

"Ouija Board: Bunshinsaba" is a terrifying horror-thriller by Ahn Bhung-ki, the director of the smash hit "The Phone," which is being remade by Hollywood, like "The Ring" and "The Grudge."

In the film, Yoo-jin (Lee Se-eun) is a student tormented by her peers at her new school. She attempts to take revenge by call-

MORE/ A22

Jet Li injured in tsunami waves

JET LI

HONG KONG—Vacationing action star Jet Li injured his foot as he protected his daughter from tsunami waves that flooded his hotel in the Maldives, Hong Kong newspapers reported Tuesday.

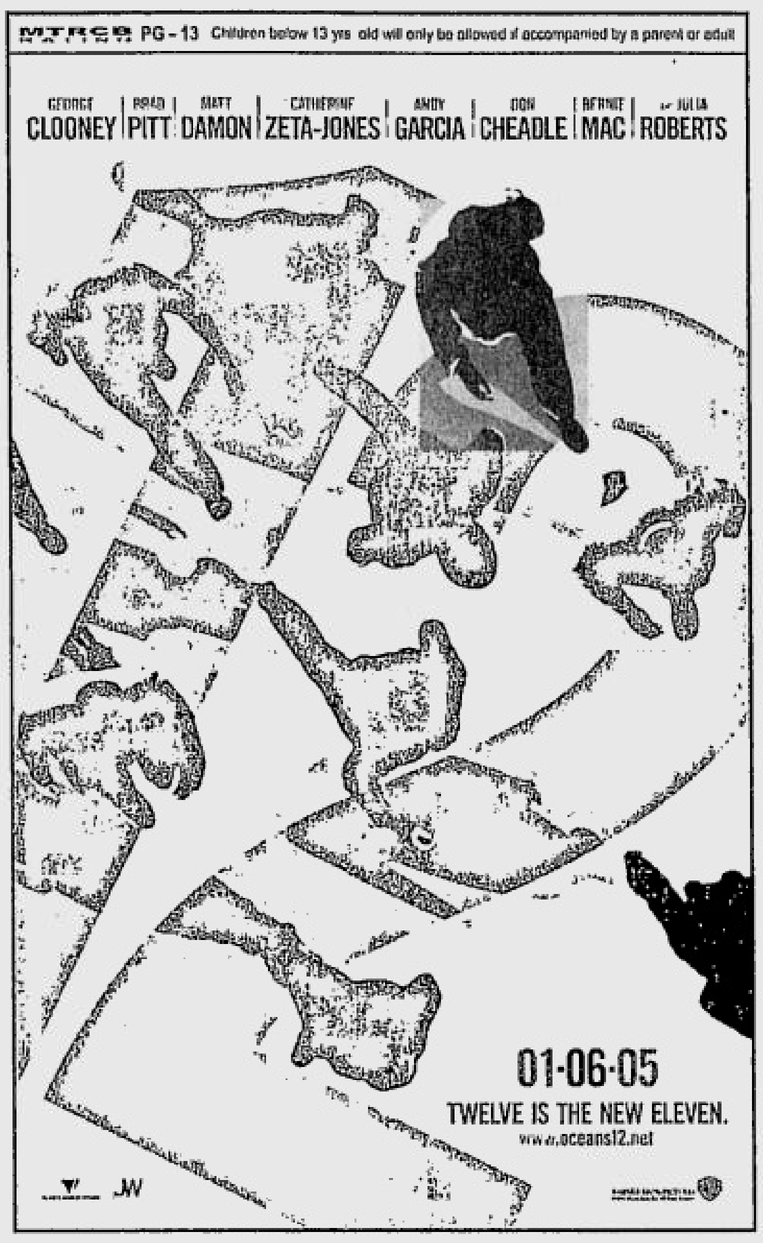
Li, who played the villain in "Lethal Weapon 4," was with his daughter in the hotel's lobby Sunday when huge waves gushed into the hotel, the Apple Daily newspaper reported, quoting a friend vacationing with Li.

Li slightly injured his foot while picking up his daughter, the report said. Ming Pao Daily News reported Li struck his foot against a floating piece of furniture.

A 9.0-magnitude earthquake hit the Indonesian island of Sumatra early Sunday, sparking massive waves that struck 10 countries, including Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Somalia.

The natural disaster has killed more than 22,000, with the Maldives recording at least 43 deaths.

Li made his name in Hong Kong as a martial arts film star before moving on to Hollywood. He has starred in such movies as "Romeo Must Die" and the recent box-office hit, "Hero."



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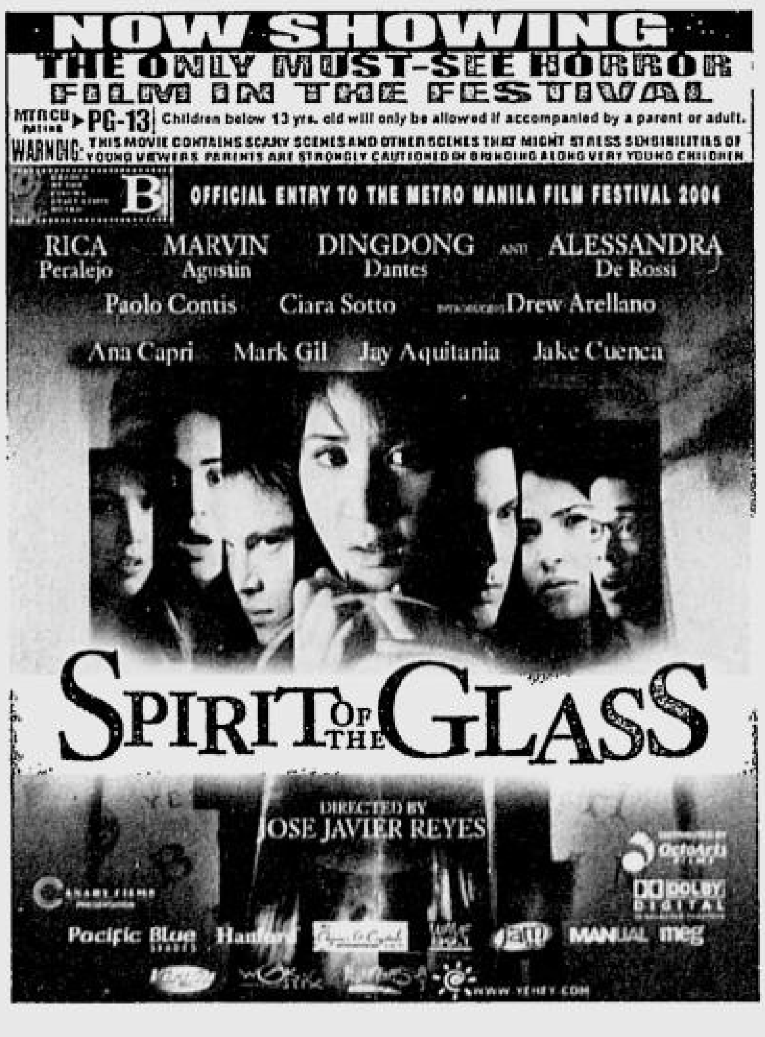

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Paolo Contis Ciara Sotto introducing Drew Arellano
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DIRECTED BY JOSE JAVIER REYES
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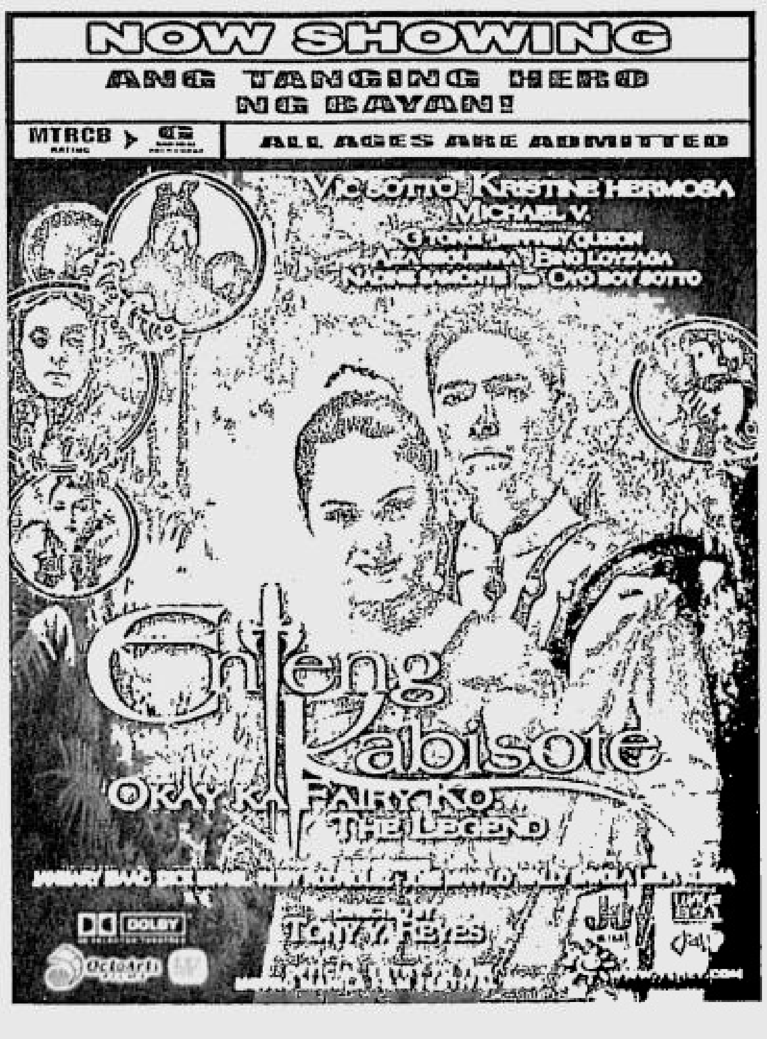

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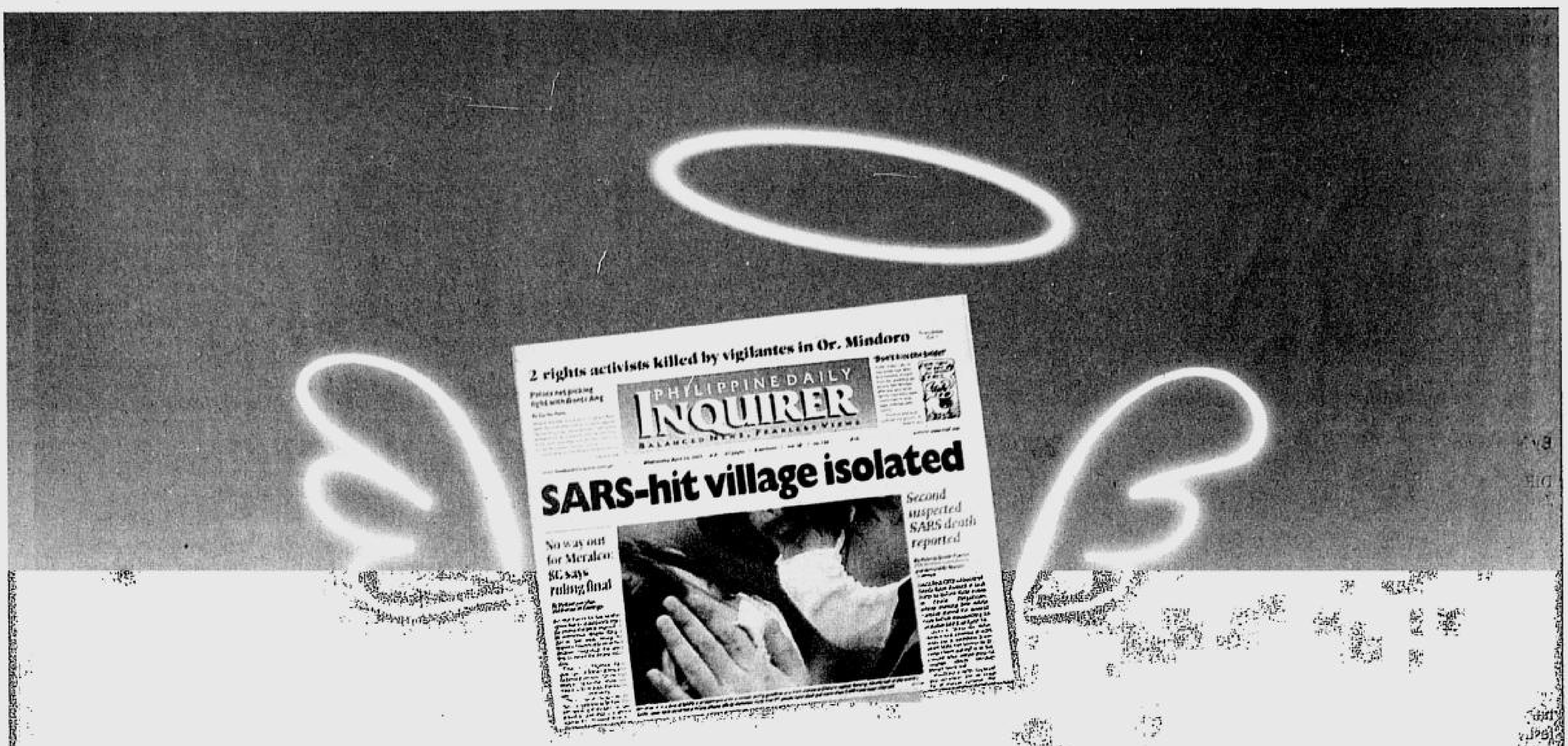
2 rights activists killed by vigilantes in Or. Mindoro
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
SARS-hit village isolated
Second suspected SARS death reported
No way out for Meralco: SC says ruling final

The Good News

[illegible]
something good.

[illegible]

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

WEDNESDAYS 10:00 pm

LOOK WHO'S TALKING
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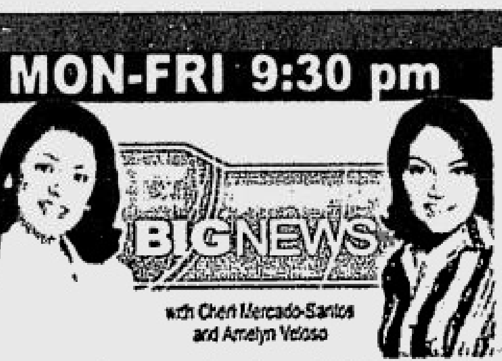
ABC ihs taye

MON-FRI 9:30 pm



with Cheri Mercado-Santos and Amelyn Veloso

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PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER

TV GUIDE
Wednesday, December 29, 2004

Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABS-CBN 2				Showbiz No. 1	Sandara's Romance	Get Backers	Ragnarok	Masked Rider Ryuki	TV Patrol	Spirits	Krystala	Lovers In Paris	Hiram	Star Circle Nat'l Teen Quest	Yes Yes Show			Insider	Special Assignment
NBN	Value Vision	Value Vision		Value Vision	Teledyaryo	Value Vision		Talk Ko 'To		Linya		Teledyaryo		Marconi Cup 2003				MMDA On The Road	
ABC 5			Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko	PBA Game-Bol	PBA				Sentro	PBA					Big News	Look Who's Talking		Philippine Badminton Tournaments	Billboard On-Air
GMA 7	Leya (2:45 PM)	Joyride (3:15 PM)	Snow Angel (3:45 PM)		One Piece	Witch Hunter Robin	Slam Dunk	24 Oras		Extra Challenge		Mulawin	Starstruck (8:45 PM)	Forever In My Heart (9:15 PM)		Nuts Entertainment			Saksi
RPN 9	Metro TV Shopping			Hey Arnold!	As Told By Ginger	Wild Thornberries	Sponge Bob	Entertainment Tonight	Scrubs	Everwood		Ally McBeal		Metro Manila Film Fest Award		Newswatch Now			
IBC 13		Japan Video Topic		EZ Shop		IBC Express Balita		Home Shopping Network		Retro TV		Linawin Natin		D.E.N.R.		Retro TV	IBC News Tonite	Breaking Barriers	
Solar		Wwe Heat		WWE Confidential		Streetfighter	Static Shock	Godzilla	Incredible Hulk	Invisible Man		Wwe Raw				Wwe Heat		WWE Confidential	
Nickelodeon	Dora, The Explorer	Little Bear	Blues Clues	SpongeBob SquarePants	All That	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	The Brother's Garcia	Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	As Told By Ginger	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	All That	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	Rocket Power	The Wild Thornberrys	The Brother's Garcia
MYX		Urban MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		Mellow MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	Urban MYX	MYX Live!		My MYX	MYX Backtrax	OPM MYX	Mellow MYX
ETC		Knock First	JKX	The Today Show		Starting Over		NBC Nightly News	Entertainment Tonight	Will & Grace	Good Morning Miami	2004 American Music Awards Part 2		Meet My Folks		Tonight Show With Jay Leno		Blind Date	Fifth Wheel
Cinema One		Slaw				Dahas				Pag-ibig Ko Sa Iyo'y Totoo			Persona	Mano Po (9:15 PM)				Spirit Warriors 2: The Shortcut	
Studio 23	Bewitched	Urban MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	Batman Animated Series	Samurai Deeper Kyo	Wazzup Wazzup	Mr. Bean	C.S.I.		The Amazing Race 6		News Central	The Oprah Winfrey Show		The Good Life With Cory Quirino
AXN		Fear Factor		Alias		Ripley's Believe It or Not		Gensomaden Saiyuki	Gensomaden Saiyuki	7 Days		The Amazing Race		CSI: Miami		Fear Factor		Alias	
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		Hollywood Squares	Home Improvement	Ally McBeal		The Simpsons	The Drew Carey Show	Star News Asia	Friends	Ed		Philly		Third Watch		Friends	Ed
CNN				Business International		Larry King Live		World News	World Sport	Business International		World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport
National Geographic	On Assignment	Passport	Sunset Boulevard Of Dreams	Taboo		Extreme Latitude	Young Global Hot Shots	The Snake Wranglers	Croc Chronicles Dr. Brady Barr	Wild		About Asia		Nat'l Geographic Specials		Passport		Taboo	
Solar Sports		FIVB Beach World Tour Milano WF			IBF Japan '04 WB/WD Finals					WTA Volvo Women's Open SF2			NBA TV Daily	NBA Toronto vs. L.A. Lakers					NBA TV Daily
Lifestyle Network	Country Style	Interiors By Design	Decorating With Style	Decorating Cents	Molto Mario	Sweet Dreams	30 Minute Meals	Bill Boggs Corner	Unwrapped	Wolfgang Puck's	E! Entertainment Special		E-News Weekend		Nigella Bites	Fine Living Special		Planet Parent	Good Eats
HBO	The Mirror Has Two Faces				Seeing Double			Weird Science			Evil Never Dies			Catch Me If You Can					Cradle 2 The Grave
Star Movies				Monster's Ball			Unsung Heroes				Sabretooth (7:25 PM)			Femme Fatale			Gang Related (10:45PM)		
Cartoon Network	Scooby-Doo Show	The All New Popeye Show		Tom & Jerry Show	Baby Looney Tunes	TBA					Yu-Gi-Oh!	Gundam Seed	The Looney Tunes Show	Courage The Cowardly Dog	The Grim Adventures Of Billy & Mandy	The Addams Family	The Funky Phantom	Boomerang - Boomeraction	Yu-Gi-Oh!
ESPN			2004 acc/Big 10 Chall. Ohio Sta. vs Clemson				2004-05 Big 10 Conf Basketball-Ucla vs Michigan Sta.				Goals!	Sportscenter Taiwan	World Pool League '04 Warsaw, Poland Premier Snooker League '04 Crity Durham,UK				Sportscenter Taiwan		
Disney Channel	Kim Possible	Totally Spies	Lizzie Mcguire	Even Stevens	That's So Raven	Martin Mystery	Totally Spies	The Legend Of Tarzan	Lilo & Stitch/Un-talkative Bunny	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney			My Wife And Kids	That's So Raven	According To Jim	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney	
Cinemax	Groomal			A New Kind Of Love (4:15 PM)				Dead in the Water			On Hostile Ground			Free Willy				Dead Again (10:50PM)	
Hallmark Channel	Mad About You	King Solomon's Mines				Play With Me Sesame	Sesame Street		Bewitched	Mysterious Ways		Changi		King Solomon's Mines			Strong Medicine (10:35PM)		Mysterious Ways
Discovery Channel		Science Mysteries		Science Frontiers		Wild Discovery		Ultimate Discovery		Sayonara Changi		Hell In The Pacific Inferno		Wild Discovery		Best Of Discovery			
MTV Philippines		MTV Dyes		Non-Stop Hits		Non-Stop Hits	05 MAA Nominee Specials	MTV Get Spotted	MTV Loveline	Non-Stop Hits		MTV Rockvid	Whatever Things	TRL		Room Raiders	One Bad Trip	VH1 Hits! Video Collection	
Sports Plus				ADT Golf Skills Chall. Day2				Get A Grip	Pac 10 College Football Stanford at Cal					Golf Academy 2002	Slipstream		NFL		
EWTN	Council Of Faith	Angelus (3:15PM)	Refurbishing The Soul	The Donut Man	Faith Factory	The Holy Rosary With Mother Angelica and the Nuns Of Our Lady Of Angels Monastery	Saints For The Third Millennium	The Virtues	EWTN Gallery	Mother Angelica Live Classics		One In Their Hearts	Pope Pius XII	Daily Mass		Angelus (10:15PM)	St. Catherine Of Sienna	Our Father's Plan	

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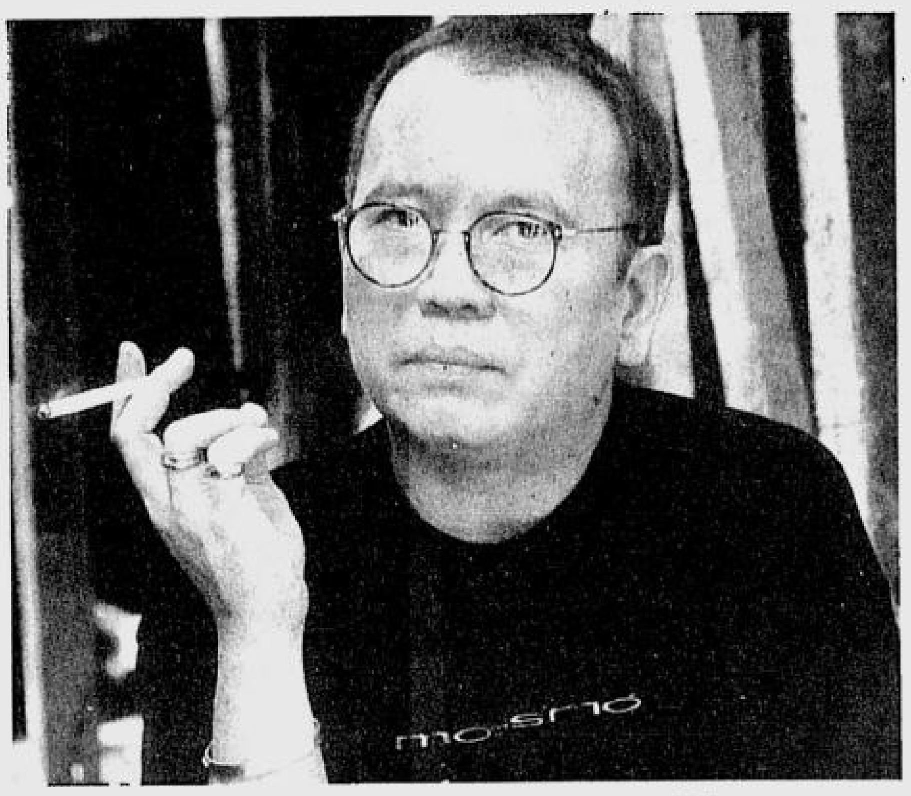
'Indies are the industry's hope, but where are they?'

By Nini Valera



COMMON WISH. "We all want the film festival to be successful."

DIRECTOR and writer Joey Javier Reyes, who has a knack for combining fine filmmaking and good box-office results, is scared that this year's ongoing Metro Manila Film Festival is an omen that the local movie industry is headed for definite death.

"This festival would not be as successful as the previous festivals," predicted Reyes, who directed "Spirit of the Glass," Canary Films' entry in this year's film fest.

"This festival is so controversy-laden, especially because of the output," he said. "People are getting to be afraid, very, very afraid that the festival will be an in-depth—if not ultimate—indication of how the industry will be next year. On all accounts, we all wish the festival to be successful.

"If these movies miserably flop this year, in a festival where no foreign films are shown, this will certainly burn the producers. Here we are dealing with four producers, some of whom have already been burned."

This point was also stressed by Viva's Vic del Rosario last year, who had said he would stop making movies like last year's "Filipinas" if they would not perform well at the tills. "Filipinas" did not, and Del Rosario has been riding the slump by not making as many movies as he did in the last few years.

Template mentality

Reyes also noted the lack of independent producers in this year's film fest.

"Except for Cesar Montano [who directed and stars in 'Panaghoy sa Suba'], we don't have indies coming in," said Reyes. "Delikado [Dangerous]. What we have here are major [movie studios], minus Star Cinema, which does not need this, mainly because of the power of their machinery."

The danger with mainstream movie producers is their template mentality, which has no room for experimentation or re-invention of movie concepts, as opposed to indies, who are the "new thinking producers who are willing to try out something new," according to Reyes.

"The indies are the hope of the industry," Reyes stressed. "If you notice, most of the major players right now operate on templates. Here, it's more of the tool. There is nothing new. But independent producers are willing to take risks. Now [festival season] is the best time for these producers to take the risk and stand a good chance of getting back their money thereby encouraging them to do some more movies even within the year."

Although Reyes pointed out that the "Filipino film industry cannot be summarized by the Metro Manila Film Festival," the yearend derby has become a barometer for what the next year would be in terms of filmmaking.

"I do understand the position of somebody like Boss Orly [Ilacad, producer of 'Spirit']. He will only produce during the festival. That's because of the discouraging numbers at the box office. So it is important that this festival would be successful so that these producers would produce more movies next year. I really hope the movies would make it."

To outdo 'Malikmata'

Despite his dismay at working with "templates," Reyes admitted that "Spirit of the Glass" is also a template.

"But there's a reason behind that," he explained: "I told Boss Orly earlier that I didn't want to do another horror movie mainly because there's another pressure—that I have to outdo my own 'Malikmata' [in last years film fest] 'which was done on a very modest budget. That was the reason why it made money—it was produced for only about P15 million. That's considerably modest considering the [budgets of the] other movies, like 'Filipinas' and the great 'Mano Po,' the franchise.

"'Malikmata' made money, and even if I didn't want to do another horror movie, well, why not give it another shot?"

Reyes said he also didn't plan on having the same cast of Rica Peralejo, Dingdong Dantes, Marvin Agustin and Ana Capri. Like most things in Philippine cinema, it just happened.

"Boss Orly wanted to make it bigger than 'Malikmata,'" Reyes said. "So we added some more stars. The whole idea, though, was we got lucky working with Rica, Dingdong and Marvin. They were very cooperative in 'Malikmata.'"

The stars did not quote superstar salaries, he added.

"In fairness to them, out of their love for a decent film, they were willing to compromise their talent fees in order to do the movie.

"When your producer is kind and decent, the stars will make adjustments. Everybody made adjustments, including myself."

4 times a year

Reyes claimed he had initially brought in "Spirit" under budget, but it was Ilacad who wanted to add "embellishments" to the movie to make it bigger than "Malikmata."

"We were running on P18 million," Reyes said. "But the costing last year was still bigger considering the devaluation of the peso."

The cost alone of film stock, an imported item, has gone sky-high, even shooting through the roof, making filmmaking a terribly risky venture even for old hands like Ilacad. But the pressure of a tight budget did not faze Reyes, who said he only had to outdo himself in "Malikmata."

There was a time when director Reyes, who is also one of the best screen writers of Philippine cinema, did four movies a year.

"That was in the mid '90's. I was doing literally one after the other. Since 1999, this is only this year that I did one movie for the year. I did four last year, with one shot the previous year, 'Angel sa Lupa,' a drama; 'Pinay Pie,' a comedy; 'Kung Ako na Lang Sana,' with Aga Mulach and Sharon Cuneta, a light comedy; and 'Malikmata,' a horror movie.

"This is really a bad year," Reyes admitted. "Also, I made a choice to concentrate on TV. It's also because I was not accepting projects that I did not like. I'm 50, I do not want to make template teenage movies."

As a writer, Reyes also turns down writing material that does not fit him.

For Peque, any time

"I have this [pride] in writing for another director," he admitted. "If I write for another director, I have to believe in that director. I choose the director that I write for. That is the only blatant [pride] that I have.

"I would write for Peque Gallaga any time," he said. "Even though I'm half asleep, I'd jolt myself awake to write for him. The last thing I wrote for him was 'Oro, Plata, Mata,' but we might have a new project soon. Maryo J., I would write for him any time."

As a director, Reyes would work any time with certain stars "inasmuch as there are *artistas* that I would never work with in this present reincarnation.

"I think they know who they are. I would work any time with Lorna

INDIES/ A25

OPENS JANUARY 6
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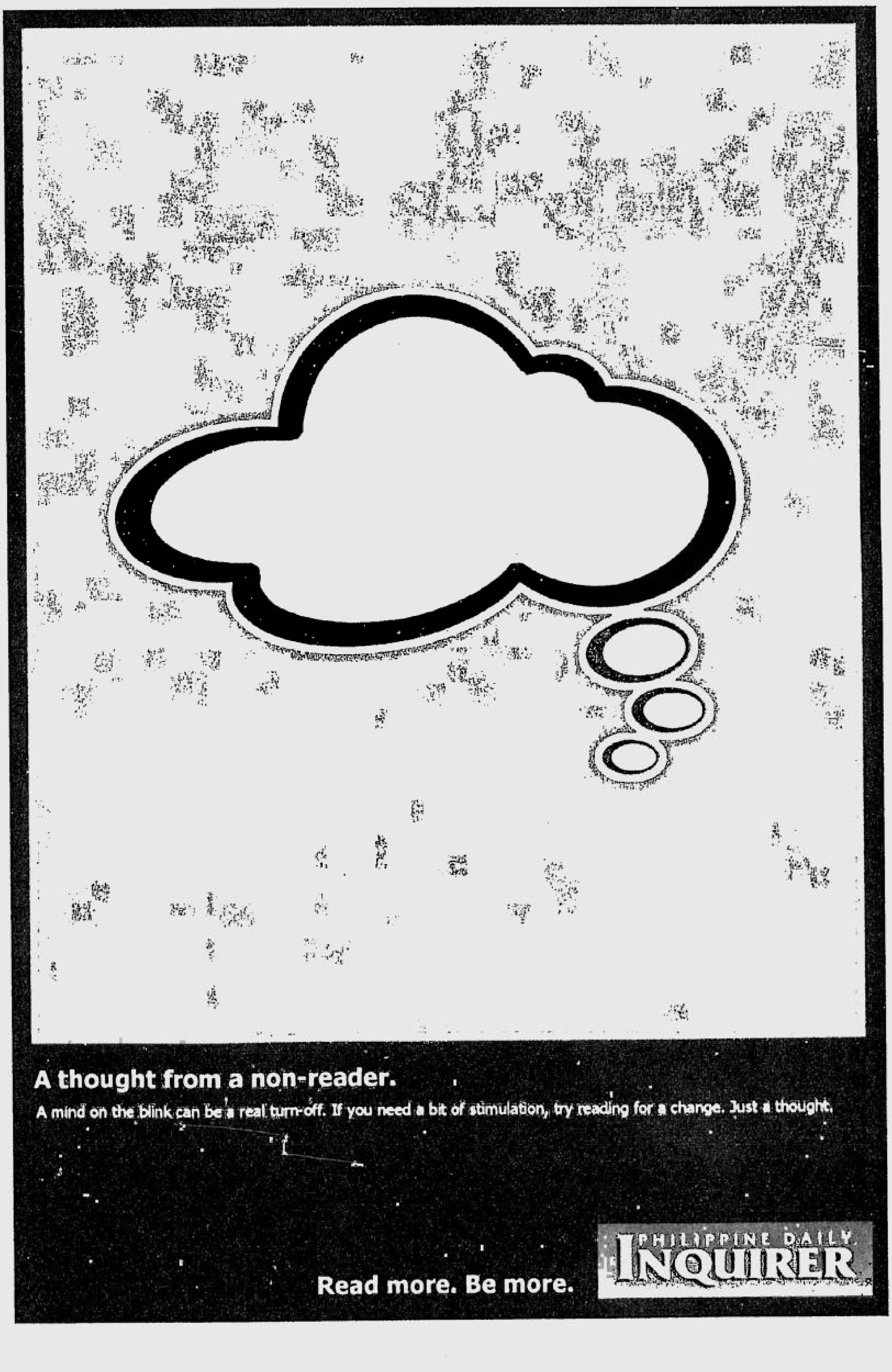
A thought from a non-reader.

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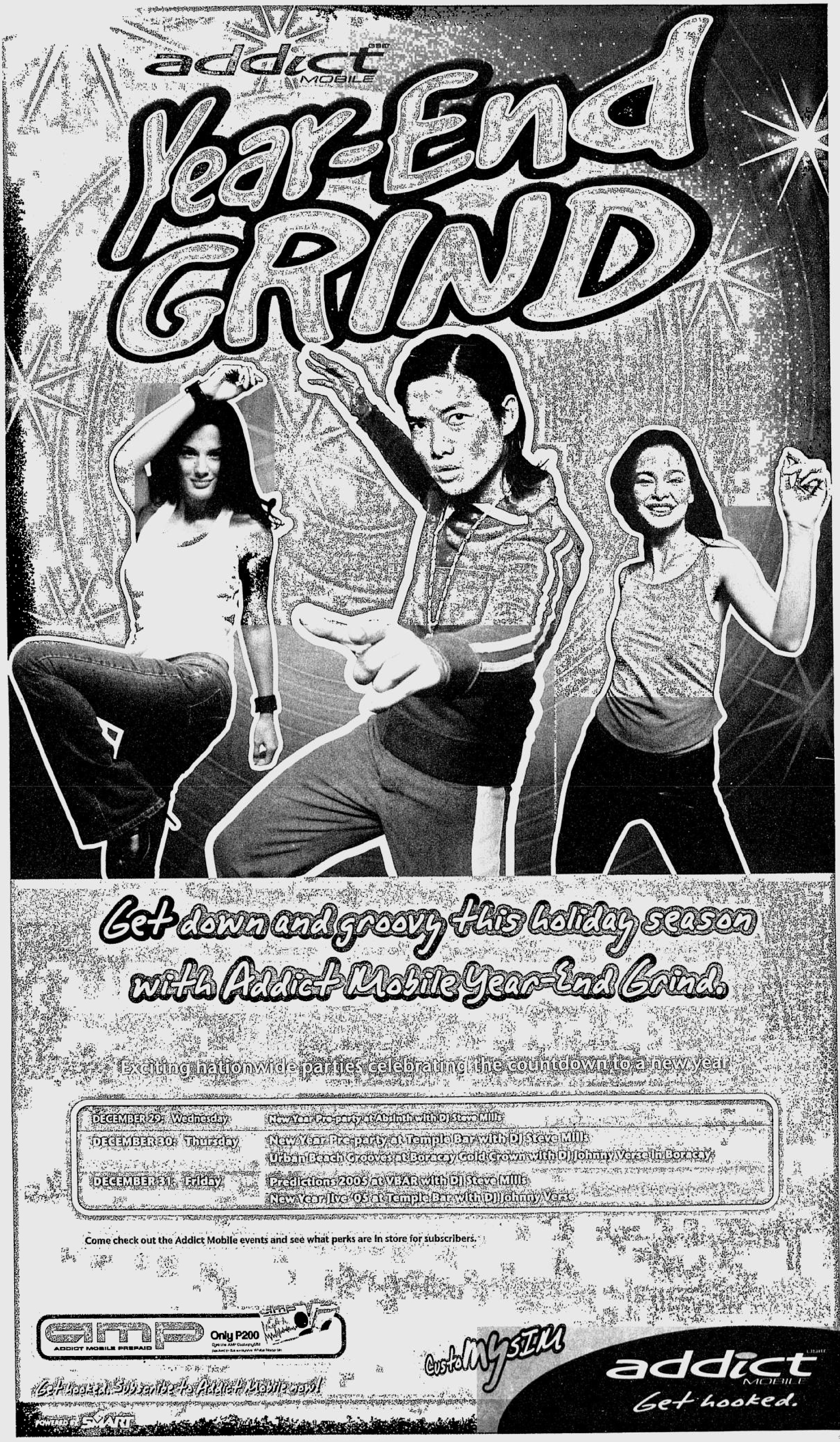

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Transco sale seen in 1st quarter of '05

Lease agreements with provincial co-ops signed

By Abigail L. Ho

NATIONAL Transmission Corp. (Transco) would likely be privatized by the first quarter of next year as it was now too late to meet the December 2004 target set by the Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM).

But PSALM president Raphael Lotilla said the December 2004 target was actually a "fighting target" that was meant to pressure PSALM to accelerate Transco's privatization process.

"The target is a range, not really a specific date. We have to put pressure on ourselves so it's good to have this fighting target," he told reporters in an interview yesterday.

He said that even before, the first quarter of 2005 was a "more feasible target" for the Transco privatization.

Energy Secretary and PSALM vice chair Vincent Perez had earlier expressed optimism that the Transco concession could be awarded by December 2004, with the completion of the privatization process seen completed by the first quarter of 2005.

However, Lotilla said certain concerns, like the government's absorption of P200 billion of National Power Corp.'s debts, took up much of the PSALM's time, contributing to its not being able to meet its December 2004 fighting target for the Transco privatization.

"We're attending to a number of nitty-gritty things, like the absorption of Napocor's debts, including whether full powers will be required from the President, given that she already has an (executive order) authorizing the absorption, and things like the transfer agent for the bonds and so on," he explained.

Even while PSALM was busy attending to things other than the Transco privatization process, he said PSALM never stopped working on the bidding terms for the Transco concession as well as getting in touch with prospective investors.

"We are continuing to get feedback informally with the investors (to ensure) that they remain engaged. From all indications, there is still a high level of interest in Transco," he said. "I guess we will just have to wait for the formal announcement by next month."

He said some four to five entities were expected to join the bidding for the Transco concession.

Meantime, Transco yesterday signed more than P55 million worth of lease purchase agreements with Negros Occidental Electric Cooperative Inc. (Noceco) and Bohol I Electric Cooperative Inc. (Boheco I) for its sub-transmission assets in the Visayas.

The Noceco agreement, worth P51.6 million, covers 73.4 circuit-kilometers of sub-transmission lines and a total of 618 structures.

The sub-transmission lines covered by the agreement include the Kabankalan-Binalbagan, Kabankalan-Binalbagan segment, Maricalum-Sipalay, Valladolid lateral and Maricalum-Cauayan 69-kilovolt (kV) lines.

Noceco is required to pay a 20-percent down payment for the assets upon the Energy Regulatory Commission's approval of the contract. The balance is payable within 14 years.

The P4.2-million Boheco I agreement spans 11.1 circuit-kilometers of sub-transmission lines and a total of 147 structures.

The lines covered by the agreement include the Tagbilaran-Dauis and Tagbilaran-Cortes 13.8-kV lines.

Boheco I decided not to avail itself of the deferred payment scheme that Transco offered and instead chose to pay for the sub-transmission assets in cash.

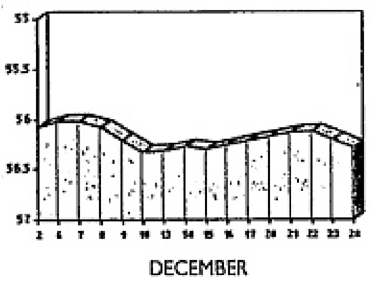
Ortiz said the state firm had so far signed lease purchase agreements for some P250 million worth of sub-transmission assets, which, as dictated by law, would all have to be sold to the various distribution utilities and electric cooperatives operating in the country.

TRANSCO/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE



P 56.285 : $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 28, 2004

¥ 103.06 = $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 28, 2004

GOLD: $444.80-445.30
per ounce Hong Kong, Dec. 28, 2004

STOCK MARKET

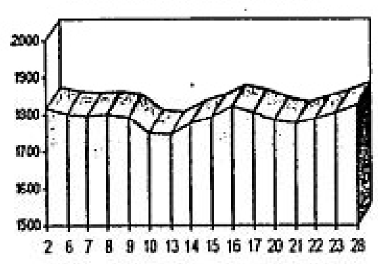
Stocks rise as investors take positions

SHARE prices closed 1.02 percent higher yesterday as investors took positions in stocks that are expected to do better next year, dealers said.

They said local investors shrugged off the impact of Sunday's devastating earthquake and tidal waves which have left around 24,700 people dead and massive damage to fragile economies in South

STOCKS/ B2

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

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Ayala Land, Fil-Estate group in property-stock swap deal

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE FIL-ESTATE Group is acquiring parcels of land from Ayala Land Inc. (ALI) in Makati to mark its foray into the bustling Makati Central Business District and fully concentrate on residential development, industry sources told the INQUIRER.

The Fil-Estate Group has entered into "collaborative agreements" which initially involve the acquisition by Fil-Estate of ALI's 100-percent interest in two companies owning pieces of property in the Makati business district.

Under the agreement disclosed to the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE), Fil-Estate will assign all of its minority interests, equivalent to roughly 30 percent, in North Triangle Depot Commercial Corp. (NTDCC) to ALI.

NTDCC is the holding firm involved in building a mall linked to the Metro Rail Transit (MRT) station on North Edsa.

ALI and Fil-Estate jointly disclosed that the arrangements will be effective "upon the fulfillment of certain conditions precedent to the contemplated transactions."

Sources said the arrangement will effectively increase ALI's stake in NTDCC to 48 percent from the present 15.7 percent and firm up the group's leadership in the mall development.

"We (Fil-Estate Group) want to focus on property development but we don't need to be experts on mall development," a company official familiar with the deal said.

"We had this opportunity to talk with the Ayalas. They have an available property where we can pursue a collaborative agreement," the source said.

The agreement has yet to be finalized. Sources from the Ayala group declined to comment.

The Fil-Estate Group owns roughly 30 percent in NTDCC. The rest are held by the Campos family, the Ramos group through Anglo Philippines, Ramcar, and other minority shareholders.

In exchange for its stake, the Fil-Estate Group will also gain cash proceeds which will be used for property development projects, sources said. The funds will not be used in any way to settle liabilities of embattled pre-need firm College Assurance Plan Philippines Inc., which is also led by the Sobrepeña family, the same majority shareholders of Fil-Estate.

We are now able to refocus on our core business which is property development and mark our presence in the Makati area," a source from the Fil-Estate group said.

While Fil-Estate is prepared to give ALI the upper hand in the mall project, it will remain as the leader in the expansion of the MRT project under another consortium—MRT Corp.

NTDCC is preparing to kickstart its P5-billion mall project by the first half of next year, industry sources had said. NTDCC is trying to get funding to start the project, which would require about P2.5-P3 billion in bank loans. The remaining project cost may be covered by equity infusion.

Construction of the 200,000-square-meter mall, at the Metro Rail depot, will start as soon as funding is secured, and will be completed by 2007, the sources said.

PLDT eyes tie-up with foreign telecom firms

By Clarissa S. Batino

PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. and its wireless units are holding exploratory talks with carriers from Canada, Italy and Singapore to bring its mobile services to hundreds of thousands of Filipinos in those countries starting 2005.

PLDT chair Manuel Pangilinan said the group was also looking to penetrate the Middle East market where millions of Filipinos work. But it may take time for the telecom giant to bring the program to the United States given unresolved issues between the US government and Philippine telcos, he added.

The PLDT group wants to cash-in on about 8 million Filipinos working overseas who send about $8 billion to their families each year.

"We are still looking at regional telcos for opportunities. There are discussions with different possible service providers in these countries. We ~~want to~~ bring in the MVNO (Mobile Virtual Network Operator), which we launched in Hong Kong this year," Pangilinan said.

But the problem with the Middle East, according to the PLDT chair, was that the "closed family ownerships" of enterprises including telcos make it harder to forge partnerships.

"But this is something that should be looked at," he noted.

Agreements with foreign carriers would allow PLDT unit Smart Communications Inc. to enhance its remittance service through text, offer cheaper text messaging, voice call and other homegrown innovative products to Filipinos abroad.

In Hong Kong, for instance, officials said Filipinos could text their family in the Philippines for only 50 HK cents per message sent instead of 80 HK cents to HK$1 through other carriers.

All one has to do is to buy the Smart SIM card. Smart must forge partnership with foreign carriers so it could pass through their network and deliver the Smart services to Filipinos.

A source said Smart was holding serious talks with Mobile One, the second biggest carrier in Singapore, to bring its 1528 Smart product to about 85,000 Filipinos in the Lion City.

PLDT and Smart partnered with CSL to bring the mobile services to 180,000 Filipinos in Hong Kong.

Napoleon Nazareno, concurrent president of PLDT and Smart, earlier said the group was looking to form partnerships with operators in Asia and Europe to service Filipino workers overseas.

MetroPac to issue 450M shares

METRO Pacific Corp. (MPC) said it will issue P450 million worth of preferred shares in an effort to rebuild its financial resources.

MPC said the shares will be subscribed by its parent firm First Pacific Co. Ltd. and by entities related to the Hong Kong-based conglomerate.

The subscription agreements are expected to be signed by the end of this year.

MPC said in its disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange that the closing of the agreements would depend on relevant regulatory approvals.

MPC plans to issue series I-C preferred shares with a par value of P1 each and convertible into common shares. For each preferred share issued, this translates into a conversion price of P1 a common share.

MPC had also said it would retire P2.1 billion in principal debts owed to Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. (Metrobank) resulting from the foreclosure by Metrobank of a 10.4-hectare property in the northern portion of the Bonifacio Global City.

Twelve condominium units owned by MPC at its Pacific Plaza Towers were used to settle P300 million in past-due interest and penalties related to the Metrobank debts.

Upon the completion of this transaction, MPC expects that parent company bank debts will be reduced to no more than P350 million by early 2005. This will be a substantial decline from P11.7 billion in bank debts three years ago. *Elizabeth L. Sanchez*

Stocks rise as investors take positions

From page B1

and Southeast Asia.

In the first day of trading since the weekend, telecommunication, financial and mining stocks were investor favorites, helping to push the benchmark index to its highest level in almost four weeks.

The market was closed on Monday for a public holiday.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index gained 18.49 points to 1,825.98, after trading between 1,807.49 and 1,835.96.

Volume totaled 722.1 million shares worth P772.6 million, from 1.38 billion shares worth P626.96 million on Thursday, the last trading day from last week.

The broader all-shares index rose 3.66 points to 1,153.86.

Gainers led losers 34 to 33, with 34 stocks unchanged.

"Gains in blue chips led by PLDT (Philippine Long Distance Telephone) pushed the market higher, with investors positioning themselves ahead of the New Year," Lawrence de Leon of Accord Capital Equities said.

"These stocks are good bargains at current prices and are expected to perform better in 2005," he said.

"We may see further gains tomorrow, although I don't expect it to be as strong as today," he added. *AFP*

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PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 28, 2004)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	26.5	28	26.5	28	931,500
Bank of the Phil. Islands	51.5	52.5	51.5	52.5	2,081,000
China Banking Corp.	575	575	575	575	820
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	48	48	47	47	90,900
International Exch. Bank	16.75	16.75	16.75	16.75	229,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	27	27.5	26.5	26.5	277,000
Phil. Savings Bank	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	1,500
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	14	14	14	14	27,900
Security Bank Corp.	28	28	28	28	22,500
Union Bank of the Phil.	23.75	23.75	23.5	23.5	1,100
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
ATR Kim Eng Fin. Corp.	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	30,000
Bankard Inc.	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	60,000
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.36	1.42	1.36	1.42	1,020,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	110	110	110	110	15,000
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	18.25	18.5	18.25	18.5	15,000
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	1.74	1.76	1.72	1.76	4,505,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	960	975	960	970	53,460
Ipeople Inc.	3.05	3.45	3.05	3.45	106,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.046	0.046	0.045	0.045	4,000,000
Liberty Telecoms Holdings	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	140,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	2.2	2.36	2.2	2.3	33,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.65	15,028,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	1360	1380	1360	1365	172,710
Ivantage Corp.	0.68	0.68	0.67	0.67	1,470,000
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	4,500,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	15.75	15.75	15.5	15.5	9,700
Manila Electric Co. B	24.75	25	24.5	24.5	265,700
Petron Corp.	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	1,418,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.9	1,191,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18	60,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	400,000
Union Cement Corp.	1.98	2	1.96	1.96	740,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	2.95	2.95	2.95	2.95	10,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	15,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	29	29	27.5	28	93,300
San Miguel Corp. A	59	59	59	59	205,900
San Miguel Corp. B	74	75	73.5	75	100,800
Phil Tob Flue Cur & Redry	11	11	11	11	205,000
Vitarich Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	20,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0048	0.0048	0.0048	0.0048	15,000,000
Ayala Corp.	6.7	6.7	6.6	6.7	4,089,000
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	330,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.25	3.3	3.25	3.25	5,107,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.025	0.031	0.025	0.031	2,500,000
A. Soriano Corp.	1.56	1.56	1.56	1.56	105,000
APC Group Inc.	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	300,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	60,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.68	1.68	1.68	1.68	15,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	16	16	16	16	6,600
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.67	0.68	0.66	0.68	5,410,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	300,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.105	0.11	0.105	0.105	1,750,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	3.5	3.7	3.5	3.65	2,603,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	1.02	1.02	1	1	5,132,000
Fil-Hispano Holdings Corp.	4.7	4.7	4.65	4.65	448,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	31	31.5	31	31	470,900
Global Equities Inc.	0.0575	0.06	0.0575	0.06	1,500,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	282,000
Macroasia Corp.	2.4	2.5	2.32	2.32	717,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.26	1.26	1.24	1.24	1,999,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.32	0.35	0.32	0.33	30,950,000
Polar Property Holdings	2	2	2	2	10,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	500,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.83	0.83	0.82	0.82	200,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	30,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	7,500,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	6,900,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Corro-Coat Inc.	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	5,000
Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.62	1.62	1.6	1.6	13,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.6	0.61	0.6	0.6	590,000
Fairmont Holdings Inc.	1.04	1.06	1	1	691,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	100,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	18.75	18.75	18.25	18.25	728,500
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	9	9.4	9	9.3	385,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	7.2	7.2	7.1	7.1	2,934,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54	20,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	3,200,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.34	0.34	0.33	0.33	5,500,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.14	1.14	1.12	1.12	2,571,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.2	0.2	0.165	0.165	410,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51	50,000
Phil Realty And Holdings	0.2	0.2	0.19	0.19	1,200,000
SM Development Corp.	1.42	1.42	1.42	1.42	25,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.7	6,736,000
MINING					
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.011	170,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	3.85	3.85	3.8	3.8	88,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	35,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.35	0.38	0.35	0.37	43,020,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.44	0.46	0.44	0.45	23,480,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	124,600,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.026	0.027	0.026	0.027	13,400,000
Omico Corp.	0.0048	0.0048	0.0046	0.0046	98,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.69	0.7	0.68	0.69	1,930,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.74	0.75	0.73	0.75	5,770,000
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	100,000
OIL					
Interport Res. B	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	20,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.0048	0.0048	0.0048	0.0048	1,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	300,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	0.24	0.24	0.235	0.235	320,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.048	0.048	0.046	0.046	700,000
Vulcan Ind'l	0.25	0.25	0.24	0.24	450,000

DISCLOSURES

PILIPINO Telephone Corp. confirmed that the Securities and Exchange Commission has allowed the increase in its authorized capital stock to P12.8 billion.

***

BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas has approved the declaration by Rizal Commercial Banking Corp. of cash dividends worth P189.9 million or P0.30 per share to stockholders of record, payable on Feb. 2, 2005.

***

DIOSDADO Marasigan, corporate secretary and information officer of **Lodestar Investment Holdings Corp.**, effective Dec. 31. All communication and Exchange notices shall be sent to Blesila Manansala, AVP-marketing, in the meantime.

***

FIL-ESTATE Group is collaborating with **Ayala Land Inc.** regarding the acquisition of Ayala Land's interests in certain companies owning developable properties in the Makati business district.

***

NAHA Port Authority announced the designation of Naha International Container Terminal Inc. as the authorized operator of the Naha Port Public International Container Terminal in Okinawa, Japan. ***Compiled by D.J. Yap, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

December 28, 2004 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.734322	1.000000	56.1130
Japan	Yen	0.007132	0.009713	0.5450
United Kingdom	Pound	1.421060	1.935200	108.5899
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.094359	0.128498	7.2104
Switzerland	Franc	0.646809	0.880824	49.4257
Canada	Dollar	0.602447	0.820412	46.0358
Singapore	Dollar	0.448496	0.610762	34.2717
Australia	Dollar	0.570924	0.777484	43.6270
Bahrain	Dinar*	1.947856	2.652590	148.8449
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.195820	0.266667	14.9635
Brunei	Dollar	0.447130	0.608902	34.1673
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000079	0.000108	0.0061
Thailand	Baht	0.018819	0.025628	1.4381
UAE	Dirham	0.199963	0.272309	15.2801
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.361800	76.4147
Argentina	Peso	0.248082	0.337838	18.9571
Brazil	Real	0.272375	0.370920	20.8134
Denmark	Kroner	0.134410	0.183040	10.2709
India	Rupee	0.016784	0.022857	1.2826
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.193268	0.263193	14.7685
Mexico	New Peso	0.065782	0.089582	5.0267
New Zealand	Dollar	0.529738	0.721397	40.4797
Norway	Kroner	0.120876	0.164609	9.2367
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012373	0.016849	0.9454
South Africa	Rand	0.130984	0.178374	10.0091
Korea	Won	0.000702	0.000956	0.0536
Sweden	Kroner	0.111093	0.151286	8.4891
Syria	Pound	0.014146	0.019264	1.0810
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.022919	0.031211	1.7513
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000383	0.000522	0.0293

Transco sale . . .

From page B1

"We started the divestment process by signing agreements with distribution utilities in Luzon. After an intensive information campaign, we were able to finalize sale contracts with Mindanao-based cooperatives and now we are doing the same for Visayas-based cooperatives. This means that for this year, we were able to sell our sub-transmission assets in all the major grids," he said.

He said the lease purchase agreements Transco signed with Noceco and Boheco I yesterday showed the state firm's commitment to divest itself of its sub-transmission assets by next year.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Neda to order review of ODA tax procedures

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL Economic and Development Authority has called for a review of the tax payment procedures involving projects covered by official development assistance (ODA) funds.

According to Neda officials, the construction of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway project has been delayed due to concerns raised by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) over the P2.3 billion worth of value-added tax and import duties that the road project entails.

The JBIC would provide the bulk of the funds for the infrastructure project estimated at P20.97 billion.

Of the P2.3 billion, P700 million is composed of VAT liabilities.

The 94-kilometer expressway project, which will become the longest toll road in the country, is supposed to link Subic Bay Freeport with the Clark Special Economic Zone in Pampanga, and the Luisita Industrial Park in Tarlac.

JBIC, which has agreed to fund 85 percent of the project cost, wants to make sure that the Japanese contractors would not be made to shoulder the taxes related to the construction of the P20.97-billion road project.

According to Neda Director General Romulo Neri, there were instances in the past when a foreign contractor was made to initially shoulder the tax payments. Later on, the Philippine government would reimburse the contractor.

But Neri, who is also the country's economic planning secretary, said it would be better if the government would pay the taxes at once and spare the contractors from shouldering the taxes, even if temporarily.

He suggested for the Department of Finance to adopt this practice to avoid a similar deferral of ODA-funded projects in the future.

The Bases Conversion Development Authority, proponent of the expressway project, said it was willing to shoulder the taxes, although the government agency said it was seeking the approval of the Bureau of Internal Revenue that it be allowed to pay the tax dues in installment basis.

However, a BIR official earlier said that the revenue agency was not supposed to allow special treatment to any taxpayer even if it happened to be a government agency.

BIR Deputy Commissioner Henares said a delay in the payment of taxes would force the BIR to impose interest charges on the taxpayers' liabilities, as provided for in the Tax Code.

The payment of taxes on ODA-funded projects, particularly those involving the Japanese government, has been a long-standing issue.

Some Japanese contractors have gone after the Philippine government to get back the P344 million in value added taxes they initially paid.

MARCOPPER REVISITED

$12M in rehab funds said to be missing

By Christine A. Gaylican

THE $12 million earmarked for the cleanup of a Marinduque river—which has been polluted with mine tailings—appears to be missing, according to officials of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau.

Environment Secretary Michael Defensor has directed the bureau to look for the $12 million the Canadian company Placer Dome Inc. released for the cleanup of the river.

Placer Dome is the mother firm of Marcopper Philippines Inc., the mining company said to be responsible for polluting the river.

"(The fund) is supposed to be held in escrow in a bank," said Horace Ramos, Mines and Geosciences Bureau director. "But as to which bank and to who's account (the fund is deposited), we still need to verify with Placer Dome and Marcopper."

A team of environment and geological experts from the United States has arrived to review the rehabilitation program set by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for the Marinduque river cleanup.

Ramos yesterday told the INQUIRER that they had received instructions from the DENR chief to check if the fund was intact before the US team of experts delivers its report by the second week of January.

According to earlier reports, Placer Dome had committed $13 million to address the environmental disaster caused by the tailings spill in the river near the town of Boac, Marinduque province.

Some $1 million had already been released to local government units to compensate the affected residents.

The use of the remaining fund would require the DENR's seal of approval.

The rehabilitation of the Boac River has been delayed for eight years after the provincial and municipal governments of Marinduque questioned the recommendation of the DENR and the Mines Bureau.

The Marinduque incident was reported in March 1998 when the drainage tunnel of the Marcopper mines was accidentally unplugged, resulting in the disastrous spill of tailings into the Boac River.

Tailings refer to the dross or refuse that remain after ore has been processed.

After the accident, Rep. Edmund Reyes and Gov. Carmencita Reyes of the provincial government of Marinduque requested an independent team of experts to assess the damage and cost of cleanup.

In June 2002, the local governments commissioned an independent team of mine safety, geological and pathology experts from the United States to conduct the study.

The local officials tapped President Macapagal-Arroyo's social fund worth P20 million to finance the study.

According to Michael Cabalda, Mines Bureau's environment division head, the US team's initial report indicated that the technical structures the DENR had set up to make sure that no further mine tailings would be deposited to the river were all "rightly placed."

"Nevertheless, further strengthening of these structures, such as dams, dredge canals, among others should be also done," Cabalda said.

The dredge canal built after the mine tailings spill had stopped the overflowing of the Boac and Mogpog rivers during heavy rains.

But Cabalda added that the US team would want to further conduct an environmental assessment of the area.

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Tariff on petrochem products extended

MALACAÑANG has decided to extend by six months the tariff on petrochemical imports at protective levels, according to an official with the Cabinet-level Committee on Tariff and Related Matters.

The source said that at the end of the six-month period, the local industry would be evaluated to determine whether it still needed protection.

"If protective tariffs are still needed, another extension of six months would be given," the official said. "(This would be repeated) until protection is no longer necessary."

The local petrochemical industry has been divided over the issue, with one side calling for an extension of protective tariffs until 2010, and the other working for its lifting by Dec. 31.

Tariff protection was established through Executive Order No. 161 issued on Jan. 9. 2003.

"There is no need to issue another order for the extension since EO 161 is open-ended on when protection would expire," the official said.

EO 161 set the Asean Free Trade Area's Common Effective Preferential Tariff on petrochemical products at between 7 percent and 10 percent, even if the Afta agreement provides that duties on petrochemical products should be reduced to 5 percent starting 2003.

Back then, Malacañang explained, a reduction of tariffs to 5 percent would cause "real problems with respect to the establishment of a fully integrated and viable petrochemical industry."

Last week, Trade Secretary Cesar V. Purisima said the Department of Trade and Industry had asked JG Summit Petrochemical Corp. to submit a business plan on its proposed naphtha cracker project to determine whether tariff protection for the local industry should be kept.

Purisima said the business plan would form one of the bases through which the DTI would determine whether protective tariffs should be extended.

Ronnel W. Domingo

Bank lending to SMEs slowed down in June

LENDING by commercial banks to small and medium enterprises slowed down at end-June this year from a quarter ago, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported.

But the BSP said that the entire banking system had complied with the mandatory requirement as rural banks, thrift banks and universal banks took up the slack of commercial banks in lending to SMEs.

The Magna Carta for SMEs requires all banks to set aside 6 percent of their total loan portfolio for "small" enterprises, and another 2 percent for "medium" enterprises.

The compliance ratio of commercial banks for "small" enterprises during the period declined to 7.3 percent from the 8.1 percent posted in end-March, the BSP data showed.

It weighed down the banking sector's overall lending to SMEs, decreasing during the second quarter by 0.6 percent or P700 million. But the sector remained compliant at 6 percent of total loans.

On the other hand, direct lending for medium enterprises increased by P1.6 billion or 1.5 percent during the quarter.

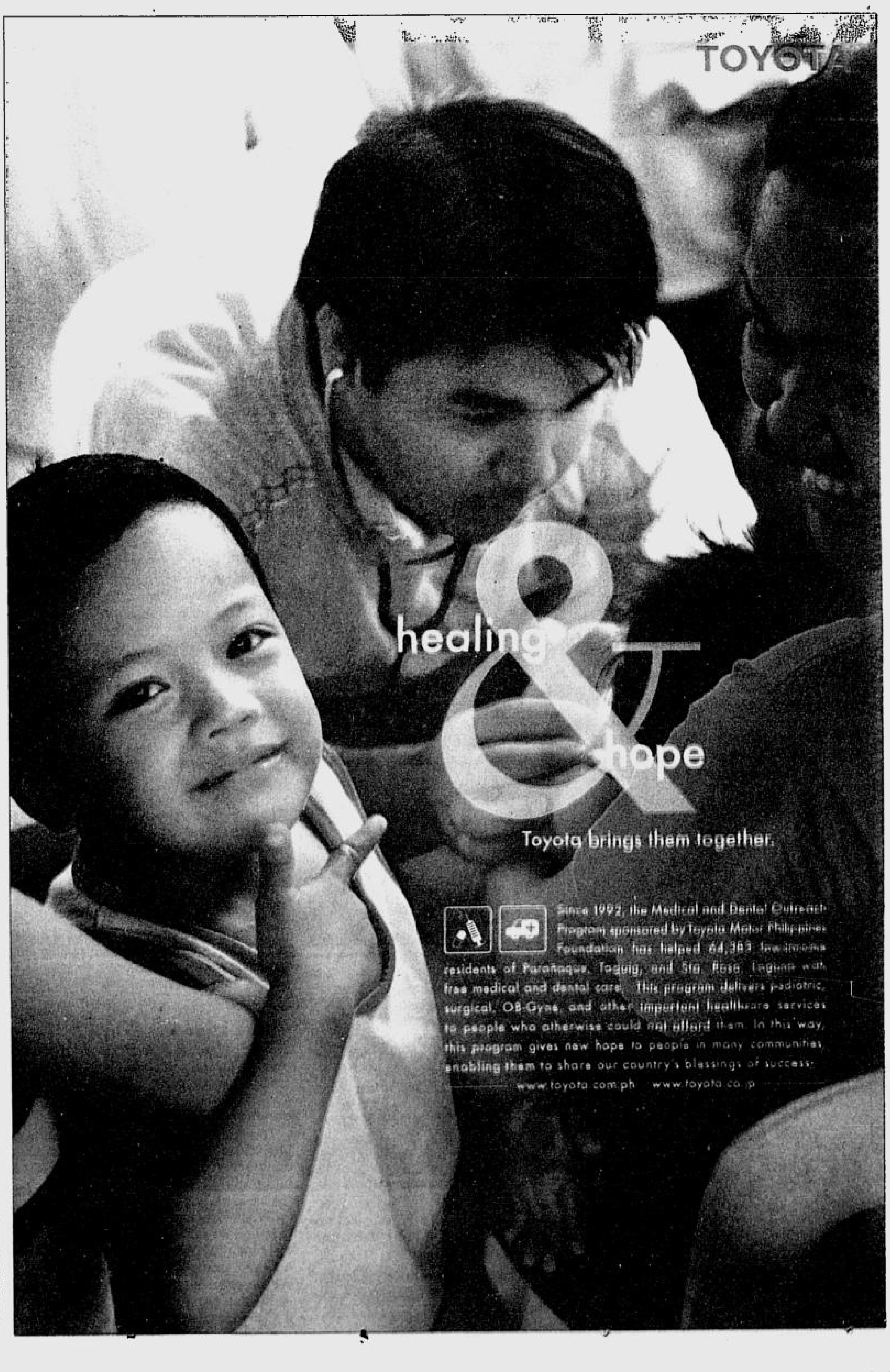
The ratio of compliance within the sector was highest with the rural banks, with credit allocation to small enterprises amounting to 43.4 percent during the period from 43 percent a quarter ago.

The thrift banking sector likewise lent more to small firms than the minimum requirement, posting a 22.1 percent compliance ratio at end-June from 22.3 percent a quarter ago.

Meanwhile, the compliance ratio of universal banks inched up to 10.9 percent from 10.7 percent at end-March.

"Small" enterprises are defined as those with capital of P1.5 million to P15 million while "medium" enterprises are those capitalized above P15 million to P60 million.

SMEs make up about 99.5 percent of all manufacturing and service establishments and account for almost 67 percent of the country's employment. Considered as the backbone of the domestic economy, the sector contributes about a third of the value added in production. *Doris C. Dumlao*



Since 1992, the Medical and Dental Outreach Program sponsored by Toyota Motor Philippines Foundation has helped 64,383 low-income residents of Parañaque, Taguig, and Sta. Rosa, Laguna with free medical and dental care. This program delivers pediatric, surgical, OB-Gyne, and other important healthcare services to people who otherwise could not afford them. In this way, this program gives new hope to people in many communities, enabling them to share our country's blessings of success.

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MOTORING

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Parts makers urge: Support local industry so more people can buy cars

By Tessa R. Salazar

(Third of three parts)

AN AVERAGE Filipino income is only enough to buy a bicycle, according to parts and component makers in the Philippines. As cars become more sophisticated and technology driven, they become even more expensive.

Parts makers in the country, however, believe they have the solution to bridge the gap between actual cost of a car and Filipinos' purchasing capacity. According to them, there are actually 3,780 solutions, and these represent the number of car parts and components inside a vehicle.

Big part

Parts makers have been emphasizing that the Philippine car parts industry is a big part of the global automobile jigsaw puzzle. They predict that if locally made parts are supported by multinational carmakers and assemblers then a broad-based manufacturing of vehicles would result. This, in turn, would help increase the income of Filipinos, enabling them to afford to buy a car.

They believe that if the country relies only on car assemblies without the parts-making industry to provide a supporting role, then cars Filipinos buy would be more expensive, as everything would have to be imported.

Local content

Asian utility vehicles (AUVs) like the Toyota Revo, Mitsubishi Adventure and Isuzu Crosswind, for instance, have between 60 and 72 percent local content. Passenger sedans assembled in the country (completely knock down units) have a local content of 40 percent. The majority of these vehicles are Japanese, Korean and American brands.

"Of the 100 parts comprising a vehicle, for instance, the Philippines' local auto parts makers can produce about 45. Unfortunately, local car assemblers buy only 10 parts out of the 45. About 45 are also being exported by the local parts suppliers to the United States, Japan, Europe and the other Asean countries," said Romeo Villadolid, secretary general of the Motor Vehicle Parts Manufacturers Association of the Philippines Inc.

As of 2004, local auto parts makers have already exported $1.5 billion worth of car parts. This figure is expected to increase to $2.7 billion by 2007.

Said Villadolid: "If car assemblers and carmakers in the country support the 35 more parts for their different models and buy them locally, more parts makers' families would have bigger incomes. The multiplier effect to the economy would be three times. Related activities such as replacement parts and service shops (would also grow). The country's per capita income would improve."

He also said local parts could also be supplied to the manufacturers "on demand" or on an hourly basis.

"There will be no carrying cost inventories. After a few years, the prices of parts and components would eventually be cheaper in the long run," Villadolid said.

The potential for a harmonious, and prosperous, automotive parts-to-manufacturing relationship may indeed exist, but is local manpower ready to put this to reality, and are multinational car assemblers willing to risk such a move?

Even as 256 local parts manufacturers claim to have a bumper harvest of talent and skills to meet the challenge, multinational car assemblers and car manufacturers still seem to be more comfortable sourcing the majority of their parts from other countries.

Still no important role

Japanese auto industry experts who recently visited Manila said the Philippines still plays no important role in the global auto parts making industry, and is actually on the verge of losing investors.

They said car assemblers and government would do well to first improve the skills of local auto parts technicians.

Kenzo Mori, leader of the Japanese Frontline Project, was recently in the Philippines to map out plans for a skills certification system to help upgrade skills and accredit qualified local workers for international status.

The project started in August 2004. It includes surveys of skills needed and actual skills levels, existing wage performance evaluation systems, existing training programs and facilities, organizational buildups, actual education and training, the planned startup of the certification system and the preparation of manuals and reports.

Skills certification

Mori was among the Japanese auto experts who said local auto parts suppliers had a lot of catching up to do compared to Japanese assembly manufacturers and large suppliers in the aspect of internal skills training resources and capabilities.

The skills certification system—much like the "bar exam" of auto parts technicians—has been widely spreading not only in industrialized countries but also in developing countries.

The project is designed to establish standards for key skills relating to the production of automobiles and their parts and to design and build a certification system for automobile manufacturing technicians in specific categories, including certification standards and criteria.

The project also includes the development of an education/training infrastructure that can be shared within the industry. The processes of metal press work, plastic molding and casting machining were identified and selected as focus of interests.

The operations for skill certification related to these are metal stamping operations, plastic injection molding, iron casting, lathe operation and milling machine operations.

The project is also designed to evaluate knowledge and skills of workers on the basis of the fixed criteria and certify them publicly, so that it has to adopt uniform certification procedures and industry-wide evaluation criteria and maintain fairness and reasonable certification practices.

The certification would also help lessen the period of training of a company, while at the same time upgrade the productivity of workers.

Lowest among Asean countries

Japan External Trade Organization executive director Toshio Asakura disclosed to the INQUIRER that Jetro has made annual surveys of the so-called local parts procurement ratio, and the Philippines has been found to have the lowest among the Asean countries. The parts utilized in the Philippines have been imported from neighboring countries or from Japan.

"In Thailand, the industry procures more parts locally, so naturally the end-cost is very cheap than that in the Philippines. We are supporting the Filipino industry to develop its supporting industries (parts and components industry) to assemble cars. By so doing you can expect cars assembled in the Philippines cheaper, and at the same time you can export parts to other countries," said Asakura.

Vicente T. Mills Jr., president of the Philippine Automotive Federation, said the certification program's focus for now would be on workers of the automotive industry. He disclosed that at level 3 certification, the requirement would be at least seven years operating experience.

The certification process, he explained, involves a "five-day training course (knowledge and practical), then a one day examination. [Then they receive] a certification that they have passed this kind of training." The application period for the skills certification is ongoing.

Global appeal for next generation Hilux

Text and photo
by Charles E. Buban

IF there is one thing the recent introduction of the next generation Toyota Hilux signifies, it's the Japanese automaker's keen understanding of its global market—that wherever they may be located, driving and riding needs are the same.

"With the latest Hilux, Toyota brings a vehicle for all roads of the world with one goal: to exceed customer expectations and provide the highest quality experience toward total vehicle reinvention," said Toyota Motor Philippines president Nobuharu Tabata.

The latest Hilux makes history as the first Toyota vehicle to be launched under the company's Innovative International Multipurpose Vehicle (IMV) project.

This means the latest Hilux will be similar—in design concept, performance and feature—anywhere it will be marketed. The Philippines had the distinction as the second country to welcome the latest Hilux (after the pickup debuted in Thailand last August) ahead of the other market.

Full resources, potential

The IMV project draws on the full resources and potential of Toyota's global production and supply bases for both vehicles and components.

"Toyota initiated the IMV project to create an optimized global manufacturing and supply system for pickup trucks and multipurpose vehicles to satisfy market demand in more than 140 countries worldwide," Tabata said.

The IMV project also calls for diesel engines to be made in Thailand, gasoline engines in Indonesia and manual transmissions in the Philippines and India, for supply to the countries charged with vehicle production (the three main production bases for the latest Hilux are in Thailand, Argentina and South Africa).

"This is made possible as free trade agreements become more common in various parts of the world, and Toyota aims to reduce production costs and offer more attractive products by establishing a production and supply network made more efficient by its global scale," Tabata added.

Toyota's vision

Like all IMV project vehicles that will be produced, Toyota's vision is for them to perform equally well on unpaved roads and on urban highways, to be affordable to a greater number of people, and at the same time to provide unprecedented satisfaction in terms of comfort, styling, handling, safety, fuel economy and its impact to the environment.

"No matter where these IMV project vehicles are assembled or sold, Toyota wants its customers to enjoy the 'Made by Toyota' badge, which represents the company's highest aspiration for quality," Tabata said.

Bigger body

It has been a while since the Hilux had a major makeover. What immediately sets the latest Hilux from its predecessors is its bigger body.

In fact, TMP's public affairs group head Ariel de Jesus described the latest Hilux as the biggest in its class, with an overall length of 5.255 m, a width of 1.835 m and a height of 1.810 m.

"The latest Hilux also sports a bold new look, better aerodynamics, increased fuel efficiency, and low wind and road noise (a lower coefficient drag of 0.37)," he said.

The latest Hilux models sold here in the Philippines are powered by either a 3.0-liter diesel engine with the latest-generation common rail fuel-injection technology, turbo and intercooler (available in the 4x4 G automatic and manual models) and a 2.5-liter diesel engine with turbo and common rail technology (available in the 4x2 E and J manual models).

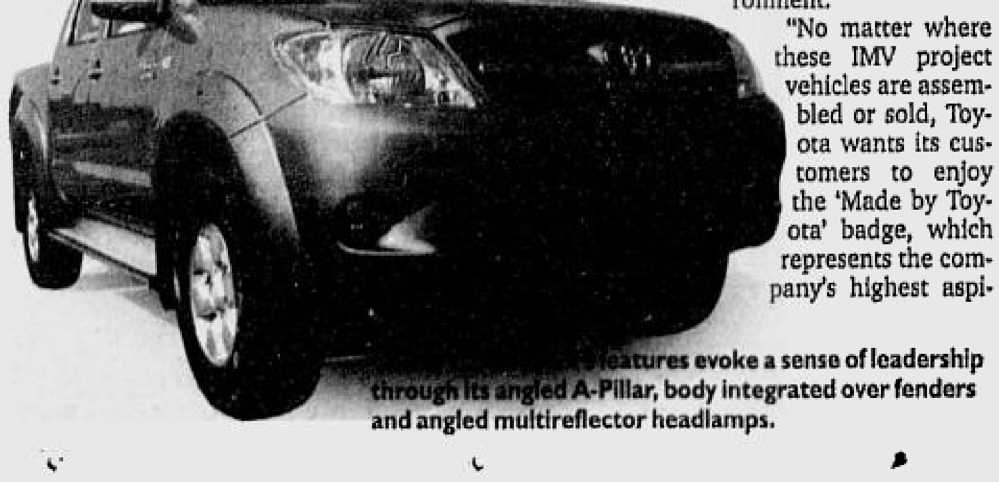
Prices range from P748,000 for the base 4x2 J manual, P928,000 for the 4x2 E manual, P1.25 million for the 4x4 G manual to P1.035 million for the top-of-the-line 4x4 G automatic.

Greatly improved

Ride comfort has been greatly improved over the previous Hilux (2004 model) as this reporter experienced during a test drive held exclusively for the local motoring media at the Clark Field in Pampanga.

The more comfortable ride is attributed to the latest Hilux's redesigned suspension: double wishbone with coil springs and stabilizer in front and rigid axle, leaf spring at the back.

"With these improvements and high levels of style and comfort features, the latest Hilux will surely add appeal to owners who want to use their pickup as much more than a work vehicle, or drivers looking for a versatile alternative to a conventional car as their day-to-day transport," De Jesus concluded.



features evoke a sense of leadership through its angled A-Pillar, body integrated over fenders and angled multireflector headlamps.

A new hope

By Andre Palma

COMMENTARY

I COULD not help but use the title of my favorite movie for this article. The incoming year 2005 is expected to give the Philippines a fresh opportunity for better things since even the cynical can muse over the question, "What else can go wrong?" For the motoring public, a fresh year ushers in both uncertainty and optimistic anticipation. We need not feel like my favorite band of scruffy Alliance rebels in their struggle against the evil Imperial Forces because powers that dictate how we drive, the government and its various authorities, and the industry that dictates what we drive, the vehicle manufacturers, are not orchestrated by a light saber-wielding Sith Lord. The "powers that be" are generally open to both suggestions and criticism, this being my attempt at trying to coax a better motoring year out of them.

My hopefuls for 2005:

- **An MMDA review of U-turn slots.** Okay, I agree that when it comes to keeping the traffic flowing, U-turns are better than four way intersections but care has to be taken in policing these U-turns. There are vehicles that cannot take these turns in a single go, like the unusually large cargo jeepneys laden with products. These cause cars behind them to stop, and on occasion, back up to give these wide-turning vehicles some space to maneuver. Bottlenecks are also created by public utility vehicles that make their stops where U-turn exits take up road space. If the U-turn exit takes one lane, complete with orange, water-filled plastic barriers, and Manong Itoy takes one lane to take on passengers, what becomes of the road? A three-lane road becomes a one-lane sieve for traffic; a two-lane road becomes a temporary parking lot.
- **More diesel cars.** If a vehicle manufacturer is already producing a diesel-powered version of a popular car sold in the Philippines then why not make it an option for consumers? The unremarkable Hyundai Matrix is sold with a spectacular 1.5-liter common rail diesel engine in Europe and boasts of 134 foot pounds of torque at a comfortable 2,000 rpm. This has exactly the same pulling power as their 2.0-liter coupé model! Fuel efficiency is claimed as 47.1 miles per gallon or roughly 12.4 kilometers per liter. The BMW 3 series, solely sold in the Philippines as a gasoline-powered car, has a remarkable 3.0-liter diesel engine that looks very tempting. With a claimed 303 ft./lb of torque, it is hard to imagine this little compact car has more pulling power than the 3.6-liter V8 Ferrari Modena.

A NEW/B5

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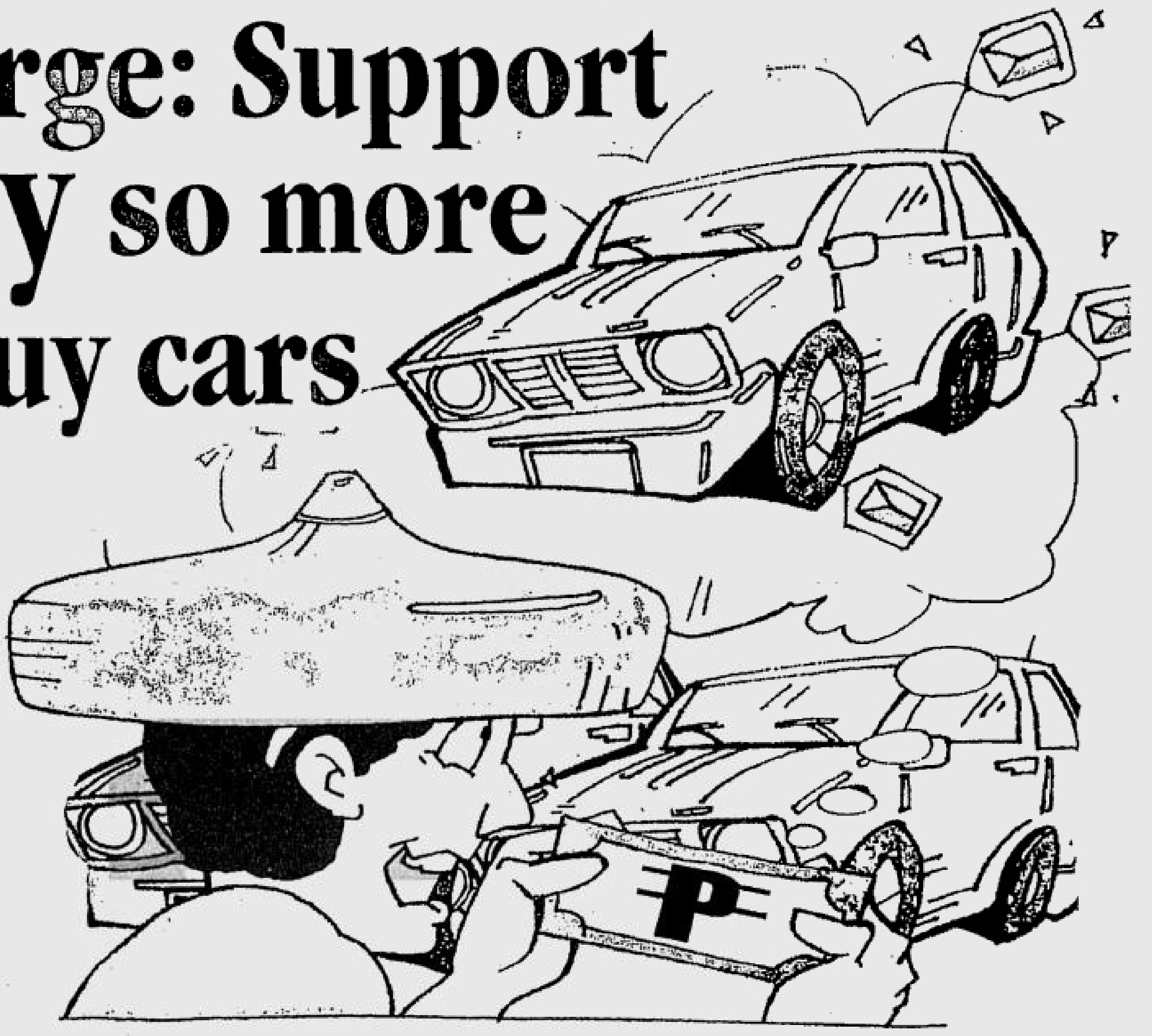
Parts makers urge: Support local industry so more people can buy cars



By Tessa R. Salazar

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"Of the 100 parts comprising a vehicle, for instance, the Philippines' local auto parts makers can produce about 45. Unfortunately, local car assemblers buy only 10 parts out of the 45. About 45 are also being exported by the local parts suppliers to the United States, Japan, Europe and the other Asean countries," said Romeo Villadolid, secretary general of the Motor Vehicle Parts Manufacturers Association of the Philippines Inc.

As of 2004, local auto parts makers have already exported $1.5 billion worth of car parts. This figure is expected to increase to $2.7 billion by 2007.

Said Villadolid: "If car assemblers and carmakers in the country support the 35 more parts for their different models and buy them locally, more parts makers' families would have bigger incomes. The multiplier effect to the economy would be three times. Related activities such as replacement parts and service shops (would also grow). The country's per capita income would improve."

He also said local parts could also be supplied to the manufacturers "on demand" or on an hourly basis.

"There will be no carrying cost inventories. After a few years, the prices of parts and components would eventually be cheaper in the long run," Villadolid said.

The potential for a harmonious, and prosperous, automotive parts-to-manufacturing relationship may indeed exist, but is local manpower ready to put this to reality, and are multinational car assemblers willing to risk such a move?

Even as 256 local parts manufacturers claim to have a bumper harvest of talent and skills to meet the challenge, multinational car assemblers and car manufacturers still seem to be more comfortable sourcing the majority of their parts from other countries.

Still no important role

Japanese auto industry experts who recently visited Manila said the Philippines still plays no important role in the global auto parts making industry, and is actually on the verge of losing investors.

They said car assemblers and government would do well to first improve the skills of local auto parts technicians.

Kenzo Mori, leader of the Japanese Frontline Project, was recently in the Philippines to map out plans for a skills certification system to help upgrade skills and accredit qualified local workers for international status.

The project started in August 2004. It includes surveys of skills needed and actual skills levels, existing wage performance evaluation systems, existing training programs and facilities, organizational buildups, actual education and training, the planned startup of the certification system and the preparation of manuals and reports.

Skills certification

Mori was among the Japanese auto experts who said local auto parts suppliers had a lot of catching up to do compared to Japanese assembly manufacturers and large suppliers in the aspect of internal skills training resources and capabilities.

The skills certification system—much like the "bar exam" of auto parts technicians—has been widely spreading not only in industrialized countries but also in developing countries.

The project is designed to establish standards for key skills relating to the production of automobiles and their parts and to design and build a certification system for automobile manufacturing technicians in specific categories, including certification standards and criteria.

The project also includes the development of an education/training infrastructure that can be shared within the industry. The processes of metal press work, plastic molding and casting machining were identified and selected as focus of interests.

The operations for skill certification related to these are metal stamping operations, plastic injection molding, iron casting, lathe operation and milling machine operations.

The project is also designed to evaluate knowledge and skills of workers on the basis of the fixed criteria and certify them publicly, so that it has to adopt uniform certification procedures and industry-wide evaluation criteria and maintain fairness and reasonable certification practices.

The certification would also help lessen the period of training of a company, while at the same time upgrade the productivity of workers.

Lowest among Asean countries

Japan External Trade Organization executive director Toshio Asakura disclosed to the INQUIRER that Jetro has made annual surveys of the so-called local parts procurement ratio, and the Philippines has been found to have the lowest among the Asean countries. The parts utilized in the Philippines have been imported from neighboring countries or from Japan.

"In Thailand, the industry procures more parts locally, so naturally the end-cost is very cheap than that in the Philippines. We are supporting the Filipino industry to develop its supporting industries (parts and components industry) to assemble cars. By so doing you can expect cars assembled in the Philippines cheaper, and at the same time you can export parts to other countries," said Asakura.

Vicente T. Mills Jr., president of the Philippine Automotive Federation, said the certification program's focus for now would be on workers of the automotive industry. He disclosed that at level 3 certification, the requirement would be at least seven years operating experience.

The certification process, he explained, involves a "five-day training course (knowledge and practical), then a one day examination. [Then they receive] a certification that they have passed this kind of training." The application period for the skills certification is ongoing.

Global appeal for next generation Hilux

Text and photo
by Charles E. Buban

IF there is one thing the recent introduction of the next generation Toyota Hilux signifies, it's the Japanese automaker's keen understanding of its global market—that wherever they may be located, driving and riding needs are the same.

"With the latest Hilux, Toyota brings a vehicle for all roads of the world with one goal: to exceed customer expectations and provide the highest quality experience toward total vehicle reinvention," said Toyota Motor Philippines president Nobuharu Tabata.

The latest Hilux makes history as the first Toyota vehicle to be launched under the company's Innovative International Multipurpose Vehicle (IMV) project.

This means the latest Hilux will be similar—in design concept, performance and feature—anywhere it will be marketed. The Philippines had the distinction as the second country to welcome the latest Hilux (after the pickup debuted in Thailand last August) ahead of the other market.

Full resources, potential

The IMV project draws on the full resources and potential of Toyota's global production and supply bases for both vehicles and components.

"Toyota initiated the IMV project to create an optimized global manufacturing and supply system for pickup trucks and multipurpose vehicles to satisfy market demand in more than 140 countries worldwide," Tabata said.

The IMV project also calls for diesel engines to be made in Thailand, gasoline engines in Indonesia and manual transmissions in the Philippines and India, for supply to the countries charged with vehicle production (the three main production bases for the latest Hilux are in Thailand, Argentina and South Africa).

"This is made possible as free trade agreements become more common in various parts of the world, and Toyota aims to reduce production costs and offer more attractive products by establishing a production and supply network made more efficient by its global scale," Tabata added.

Toyota's vision

Like all IMV project vehicles that will be produced, Toyota's vision is for them to perform equally well on unpaved roads and on urban highways, to be affordable to a greater number of people, and at the same time to provide unprecedented satisfaction in terms of comfort, styling, handling, safety, fuel economy and its impact to the environment.

"No matter where these IMV project vehicles are assembled or sold, Toyota wants its customers to enjoy the 'Made by Toyota' badge, which represents the company's highest aspiration for quality," Tabata said.

features evoke a sense of leadership through its angled A-Pillar, body integrated over fenders and angled multireflector headlamps.

Bigger body

It has been a while since the Hilux had a major makeover. What immediately sets the latest Hilux from its predecessors is its bigger body.

In fact, TMP's public affairs group head Ariel de Jesus described the latest Hilux as the biggest in its class, with an overall length of 5.255 m, a width of 1.835 m and a height of 1.810 m.

"The latest Hilux also sports a bold new look, better aerodynamics, increased fuel efficiency, and low wind and road noise (a lower coefficient drag of 0.37)," he said.

The latest Hilux models sold here in the Philippines are powered by either a 3.0-liter diesel engine with the latest-generation common rail fuel-injection technology, turbo and intercooler (available in the 4x4 G automatic and manual models) and a 2.5-liter diesel engine with turbo and common rail technology (available in the 4x2 E and J manual models).

Prices range from P748,000 for the base 4x2 J manual, P928,000 for the 4x2 E manual, P1.25 million for the 4x4 G manual to P1.035 million for the top-of-the-line 4x4 G automatic.

Greatly improved

Ride comfort has been greatly improved over the previous Hilux (2004 model) as this reporter experienced during a test drive held exclusively for the local motoring media at the Clark Field in Pampanga.

The more comfortable ride is attributed to the latest Hilux's redesigned suspension: double wishbone with coil springs and stabilizer in front and rigid axle, leaf spring at the back.

"With these improvements and high levels of style and comfort features, the latest Hilux will surely add appeal to owners who want to use their pickup as much more than a work vehicle, or drivers looking for a versatile alternative to a conventional car as their day-to-day transport," De Jesus concluded.

A new hope

By Andre Palma

COMMENTARY

I COULD not help but use the title of my favorite movie for this article. The incoming year 2005 is expected to give the Philippines a fresh opportunity for better things since even the cynical can muse over the question, "What else can go wrong?" For the motoring public, a fresh year ushers in both uncertainty and optimistic anticipation. We need not feel like my favorite band of scruffy Alliance rebels in their struggle against the evil Imperial Forces because powers that dictate how we drive, the government and its various authorities, and the industry that dictates what we drive, the vehicle manufacturers, are not orchestrated by a light saber-wielding Sith Lord. The "powers that be" are generally open to both suggestions and criticism, this being my attempt at trying to coax a better motoring year out of them.

My hopefuls for 2005:

- **An MMDA review of U-turn slots.** Okay, I agree that when it comes to keeping the traffic flowing, U-turns are better than four way intersections but care has to be taken in policing these U-turns. There are vehicles that cannot take these turns in a single go, like the unusually large cargo jeepneys laden with products. These cause cars behind them to stop, and on occasion, back up to give these wide-turning vehicles some space to maneuver. Bottlenecks are also created by public utility vehicles that make their stops where U-turn exits take up road space. If the U-turn exit takes one lane, complete with orange, water-filled plastic barriers, and Manong Itoy takes one lane to take on passengers, what becomes of the road? A three-lane road becomes a one-lane sieve for traffic; a two-lane road becomes a temporary parking lot.
- **More diesel cars.** If a vehicle manufacturer is already producing a diesel-powered version of a popular car sold in the Philippines then why not make it an option for consumers? The unremarkable Hyundai Matrix is sold with a spectacular 1.5-liter common rail diesel engine in Europe and boasts of 134 foot pounds of torque at a comfortable 2,000 rpm. This has exactly the same pulling power as their 2.0-liter coupé model! Fuel efficiency is claimed as 47.1 miles per gallon or roughly 12.4 kilometers per liter. The BMW 3 series, solely sold in the Philippines as a gasoline-powered car, has a remarkable 3.0-liter diesel engine that looks very tempting. With a claimed 303 ft./lb of torque, it is hard to imagine this little compact car has more pulling power than the 3.6-liter V8 Ferrari Modena.

A NEW/B5

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A Happy New Motoring Year

IT will be a Happy New Motoring Year in this corner of the world as two big car events are scheduled for the first time here.

In February 2005, the Car Awards Group Inc. (Cagi), consisting of 45 motoring journalists from more than 20 media outfits, will proclaim the winners of the CAR OF THE YEAR awards at a gala awards dinner to be held in Makati. The country's national auto club, Automobile Association Philippines (formerly Philippine Motor Association), which funded the testing of 58 makes and models entered by car manufacturers, is top-billed as the presenter while Worldbex International Services Inc. will be the major sponsor.

MANILA MOTOR SHOW. In April, the first Manila Motor Show (MMS) will be held, complete with concept cars from the latest Tokyo Motor Show. The winners of the Car of the Year awards will also be prominently displayed at the MMS.

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

In fact, Cagi and Worldbex International, the event organizer of MMS, are working together to ensure the success of both the Car of the Year and Manila Motor Show events in the next five years.

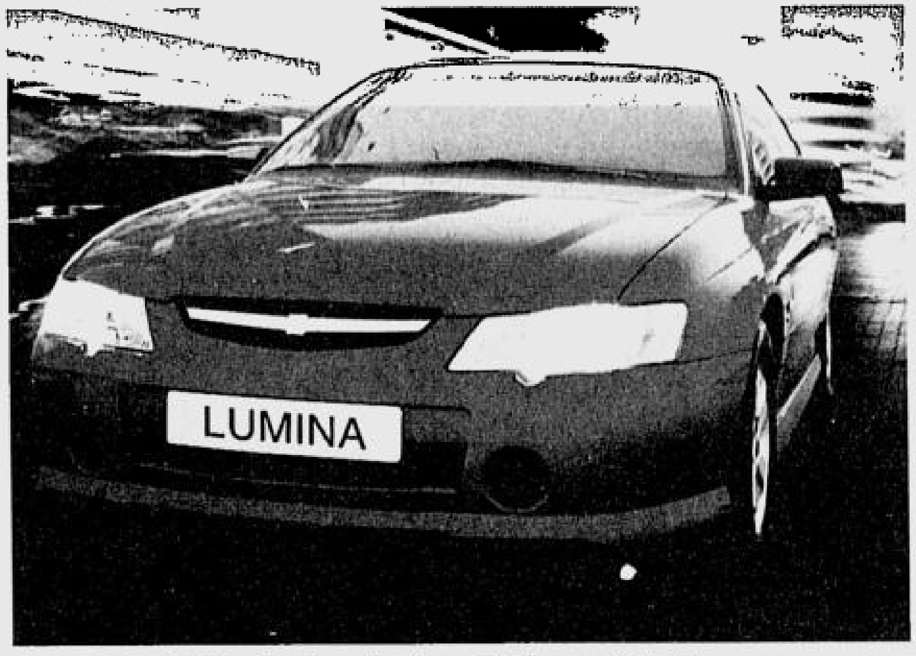
The Year of the Rooster 2005 will be a Happy New Motoring Year for another reason: the influx of exciting new motor vehicles such as an all-new Honda Civic and Toyota RAV4. Last week, this column forecast the 2005 arrival of the Toyota Avanza multipurpose vehicle, Mitsubishi Grandis minivan, Mitsubishi Montero Sport diesel, Ford Focus, Chevrolet Lumina, Chrysler 300C and new sport utility vehicles from Nissan and Isuzu.

I guessed then that the Nissan SUV to be launched here next year would be the Xterra while the Isuzu SUV could be either the Axiom crossover or the Rodeo 4x4. Now, thanks to inputs e-mailed by helpful readers, I have more definite news about the new Nissan and Isuzu SUVs.

NISSAN PALADIN, A.K.A. XTERRA. Look at the picture of the Paladin: doesn't it resemble the Xterra? Fact is, the Paladin is the Xterra by another name. I was correct in predicting that Universal Motors Corp. will bring in the Nissan Xterra since the Paladin, which is what UMC is unveiling next year, is the Philippine version of the Xterra. Assembled by the Zengzhou Nissan Automobile Co., the 5-door Paladin 4x4 SUV was introduced in China in February 2003 with a 2.4-liter, 16-valve, 4-in-line engine. It makes sense for UMC to launch the Paladin/Xterra here as it is based on the Frontier pickup platform and UMC is the Philippine assembler and distributor of the Frontier. Most likely, UMC's Paladin will be powered by the same 4-in-line diesel engines as the 2003 Frontier's, the 2.7-liter for the 4x2 manual transmission (MT) variant and the 3.2-liter for the 4x2 automatic transmission (AT) and the 4x4 variant, whether MT or AT.

THE NISSAN Paladin resembles the Xterra because it is the Xterra by another name.

ISUZU ADVENTURE MASTER. Reader Joseph Pardo thinks that the new SUV that Isuzu Philippines Corp. (IPC) will launch next year is the MU-7 or Isuzu Adventure Master from Thailand. Assembled by Thai Rung Union Car Public Co. Ltd., the Adventure Master 5-door SUV went on sale in Thailand in the third quarter of 2003. Like the Nissan Paladin, the Isuzu Adventure Master is based on a pickup truck platform—the Isuzu D-Max pickup. This means that the D-Max's 3.0-liter direct injection diesel intercooled turbocharged engine will also propel the Adventure Master. IPC will have to rename its new SUV, though, as Mitsubishi's AUV already carries the Adventure nomenclature.



THE CHEVROLET Lumina is coming in as a CBU from Thailand.

In launching SUVs based on a pickup platform, UMC and IPC obviously hope to grab market share from the attractively priced Ford Everest SUV, which is built on the Ford Ranger platform. The Nissan and Isuzu advantage over the Everest is that their new SUVs run on diesel fuel, which costs about P5 less per liter than gasoline. On the other hand, with the intro of their new diesel SUVs, UMC and IPC will be intensifying their rivalry for pole position in the diesel light commercial vehicle market. UMC's Nissan Frontier was the best-selling diesel pickup for four straight years until IPC came up with the D-Max.

The CHEVROLET LUMINA, which General Motors Automobiles Philippines (GMPh) is launching in Manila next year, was not designed for the Asian market, e-mailed reader Michael Payne. Mr. Payne claims that the Lumina was designed and manufactured in Australia for the Australian market by Holden, GM's Australian subsidiary and that, rebadged as a Chevrolet, it was exported to countries as far apart as South Africa, the Middle East and even the United States. In the United States, the Pontiac GTO is actually the Holden Monaro sports coupé. Amador Sapico, another reader, also pointed out that the Lumina was not designed and developed for Asia as it was sold and on the road for years in the '90s in the United States.

Whatever, it looks like GMPh will bring in the Lumina as a CBU (completely built unit) from its regional production center in Thailand to compete with the Toyota Camry, Honda Accord and Nissan Cefiro in the midsize executive car segment.

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: Everbody lies, but it doesn't matter since nobody listens.

* * *

(E-mail comments to asevilla@inquirer.com.ph)

Hope springs eternal

FULL TANK

Al Mendoza

I WAS talking with Mel Dizon just before Christmas.

"Another year is about to end and your wish for me hasn't come true yet," he said. "But I appreciate very much what you've done for me all these years, and for Mitsubishi as a whole. Thank you, my friend."

I had been hankering all along that, among the batch of top-notch Filipino executives in the motoring world from the '80s up to the present, Mel Dizon makes for a perfect president of Mitsubishi Motors Philippines Corp. His experience, plus an unsullied reputation, fits him to a T to the post.

But as we love to say, hope springs eternal. I will not stop yearning for that day when Mel finally sits as president of Mitsubishi, the country's perennial No. 2 in the motoring industry.

* * *

Speaking of Mitsubishi, the recently launched 2005 Lancer 1.8 MX Limited has been making heads turn for its revolutionary features.

The new variant in the Lancer lineup is equipped with a new EURO-2 compliant 4G93, 16-valve, 1,834cc engine, producing 123 PS at 6,000 rpm and 16.5 Kg-m of torque at 4,500 rpm.

As usual, the model's transmission is the highly efficient and responsive Invecs-III C.V.T., with 6-Speed Sportronic. The Continuously Variable Transmission is a revolutionary technology in automobile transmissions that transfers engine output to the drive-train via a steel belt and pulleys rather than gears of fixed ratios. The belt moves up and down from the narrow and wide ends of the cone-shaped pulleys, which allow for the seamless movement of the continuously variable gear ratios. With the "infinite" gear ratios on hand, the engine revs only to the needed rpm.

Additionally, the Sportronic feature allows the driver to upshift and downshift on demand by just tilting the shift lever to the "+" and "-" zones, giving one the performance of a close-ratio 6-speed manual transmission without the need for a clutch. And because of the Invecs-III CVT with 6-speed Sportronic, the conservatively rated engine is able to move the Lancer 1.8 MX Limited to high velocity comparable to that of 2-liter-equipped sedans but with the fuel efficiency of a 1.6-liter engine.

* * *

The new 2005 Lancer 1.8 MX Limited has an aggressively styled exterior to match its macho power.

Its new 15-inch wheel design, clear lens treatment, front air-dam, rear skirts and lip spoiler are features that set it apart from the Lancer 1.6 MX.

Even its interior is something unique by sedan standards. It has two-tone interior—the upper surface of the dashboard and door trims are bluish grey and the mid to lower portion is of a beige tone. The cabin is surprisingly expansive, making for a generous amount of legroom. Because of a super large interior, the seats have been redesigned for more comfort. The rear occupants will enjoy more legroom due to higher hip point and a long wheelbase. Soft leather seating embraces but also supports the human form. Controls and gauges are all in exactly the right place, while the wood grain trim on dashboard provides a touch of elegance to the cabin.

You have options to include a DVD/CD/MP3 player and tuner with touch-screen LCD monitor and sounding off through 6 speakers. Unlike its competitors' design, the Lancer has low instrument panel, low waistline and higher roof that help create an interior that's much more spacious and less constricting, resulting to an increased field of vision for the driver and all occupants. Entry and exit now requires less stooping, an important utility feature especially when attaching child seats or assisting elderly passengers.

Said Arlan Reyes, Mitsubishi's senior supervisor for advertising and promotions: "Another key feature of the 2005 Lancer 1.8 MX Limited is the NVH management (Noise, Vibration and Harshness). The stiffer body shell, retuned suspension and extensive use of sound and vibration insulators amounts to a smoother, quieter and stress-free ride. Overall, the space for passengers and cargo, and the ride comfort are deeply satisfying."

Because he is a quiet man, Arlan talks sense each time he opens his mouth.

* * *

The new model has amenities for everybody: a large front 2-layer console box, front door pockets, front cup holders, rear center armrest with cup holders, overhead compartment, engine cover, Mitsubishi Motors Auto Security keyless entry and alarm system.

What's more, the new 2005 Lancer 1.8 MX Limited has an all-wheel independent suspension setup found only on more expensive sedans. The sure-footed independent multilink rear suspension, which most of its competitors don't have, is equipped with a front and rear stabilizer bar to lessen body roll during cornering. G-force producing braking power can be attributed to 15-inch ventilated disc up front and 14-inch solid discs at the rear assisted by dual diaphragm brake boosters. Likewise, it is equipped with 4-channel, 4-sensor ABS with Electronic Brakeforce Distribution.

If you ask me, the price is a steal: P898,000.

* * *

QUOTE ME. I expect a robust motoring industry in 2005. And yes, Happy New Year!

A new hope

From page B4

- **Hybrids please.** If the claims of third party testers in Europe are true, then for the singular fact that the Toyota Prius hybrid model does 65.7 mpg or 17 km/liter in urban traffic, it should be sold in the Philippine market. Advances in hybrid design have allowed the gasoline-assisted electric engine to pull the eco-friendly car to a 10.9 second run to 100 kilometers per hour. Not shabby figures, as the already impressive Honda Jazz, only does 49.6 mpg or 13 km/liter, with 100 showing up on the speedometer in 12 seconds flat. Honda's own Insight hybrid may give the Toyota a run for fuel efficiency, but was sadly absent from the fuel-efficiency tests done by the BBC UK's Top Gear outfit.
- One-make races. Outside virtual reality (versus "actual reality"?), there is no cheaper means of racing and not a better way of getting a feel for competing in a production car. Drivers go head to head, in identical machines, with exactly the same equipment and level of car preparation. The only thing that separates the winners from the back-markers is driving skill, as the cars are maintained by the vehicle manufacturers too. Tuason Racing School does a version of this "one-make" racing. Competitors abroad own their cars, bought from dealers for the sole purpose of racing, and take care of them when they race. Though maintenance and preparation are freebies; collision is driver's fault, therefore it is driver's cost and driver's problem for the rest of the season. Cars that have one make races abroad range from the economical but exciting Yaris/Vitz/Echo in Japan to a Porsche GT3 cup in Europe. Suitable for many budgets and different levels of enthusiasm, one makes racing a possible reality in the Philippines. Now only if we can get a manufacturer's backing.

As with any list of aspirations, this is a mix of personal wishes and requests for the problems of our community. I am fortunate to have a forum in print media and actual nonrelatives to listen to my automotive imaginings. Let us take these issues, and others that concern the motoring public, to the people who can make our daily commutes and our leisurely weekend drives a better experience. The policy makers, both in government and the industry, should listen to the many voices that make up the motoring public. We, after all, represent votes and pesos; and the final choice of where either goes. Happy Holidays.

* * *

For comments, e-mail the author at scandyflick@yahoo.com

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Book shows how to make millions in direct sales

By Candy G. Villanueva
Contributor

SUCCESSFUL selling. That's what the book is all about. With over 40 years sales experience from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Europe and the United States, Mike Malaghan shares his direct selling expertise in his first book, "Making Millions in Direct Sales, The 8 Essential Activities Successful Sales Managers Must Do Every Day." The book, published by McGraw Hill, will be released in the country next year.

Malaghan wrote the book primarily for sales persons who work on a commission basis. With the book, he aims to help salespeople build sales empires. "There are so many books on salesmanship, how to sell and multilevel but how do you hire people who want to build empires? I never could find that one book. I always said that someday when I retire I will take everything I did and put it in book form."

A former door-to-door encyclopedia salesman, Malaghan is now president of a company leading five direct sales organizations across Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. He knows what he's writing about. The book is a practical guide to sales managers or any type of manager for that matter. Its practical tips on motivation, leadership and management apply even to those who are not involved in sales. Like a workbook, it incorporates suggestions on further reading and helpful questions after each chapter to encourage the reader to participate and evaluate his or her performance. The practical tips are complimented by inspiring stories, personal experiences and quotes from the greats that further enhance learning. Here's a preview of this highly anticipated book.

Lead from front lines

Some sales managers talk about good selling; some managers sell. Malaghan asks, "Which type do you think leads more effectively?" It is a common notion that sales managers manage people. Sales professionals who think this way got the "manager" part right but they forgot about the "sales" part. According to the author, being a good sales manager means leading by example. This means aside from handling salespeople, the manager must step out of his office and do actual selling. Malaghan says that the sales manager must remember and remind his people that selling is the job. "By continuing to sell, you not only maintain a high income, but you create a positive and powerful model for the team," Malaghan explains in the first chapter of his book.

Personal selling is also a way of training new recruits. The killing of two birds with one management stone is an effective technique that saves time and resources according to the book. "No classroom simulation comes close to the genuine experience of a live sales presentation. No virtual reality can effectively recreate the dynamics of one salesperson observing another salesperson in the field, delivering a sales talk to a real prospect," explains Malaghan.

For Malaghan, prospecting is the key to successful selling. It is so important that he devoted five chapters of the book on the topic. The intensive discussion shows managers how to teach salespeople to identify prospects.

Seize the market

Most sales managers are unaware that there is always a larger untapped market. The common misconception that the market will not support more salespeople must be abandoned because according to the author, the number of sales opportunities is substantially bigger than most sales managers can ever imagine. Once this mindset is established, the manager can then concentrate on helping his people find the right people who will listen to a sales talk.

To increase one's market means going beyond the prospecting comfort zone and using additional lead generating methods. This may also mean adopting unconventional methods and a variety of different approaches. Malaghan discusses several methods in his book. He talks about the classic approaches including door-to-door and telephone appointment. Aside from the classic steps, lead generation can also be achieved through TV lead response, direct mail lead response, website lead response and third party lead response among others. He also discusses the benefits of party plans, take-one boxes, tear-off coupons, business cards in the fish bowl, newspaper inserts, seminars, referrals and kiosks.

Malaghan claims that some methods may prove more effective than the others depending on several factors. The important thing is, the sales manager is aware of the different options and knows when to apply which method.

Hire to build empires

"Sell everyday, recruit every week," is Malaghan's motto. It is because of this mantra that this sales expert was able to build sales empires in four continents. "Constant, unrelenting, personal selling and recruiting summarizes the job," writes the author. "Do that right, and all else falls into place. Successful ongoing recruiting patterns hinge on habit, not on the success or failure of their most previous recruiting exercise, the time of year, or any other circumstance."

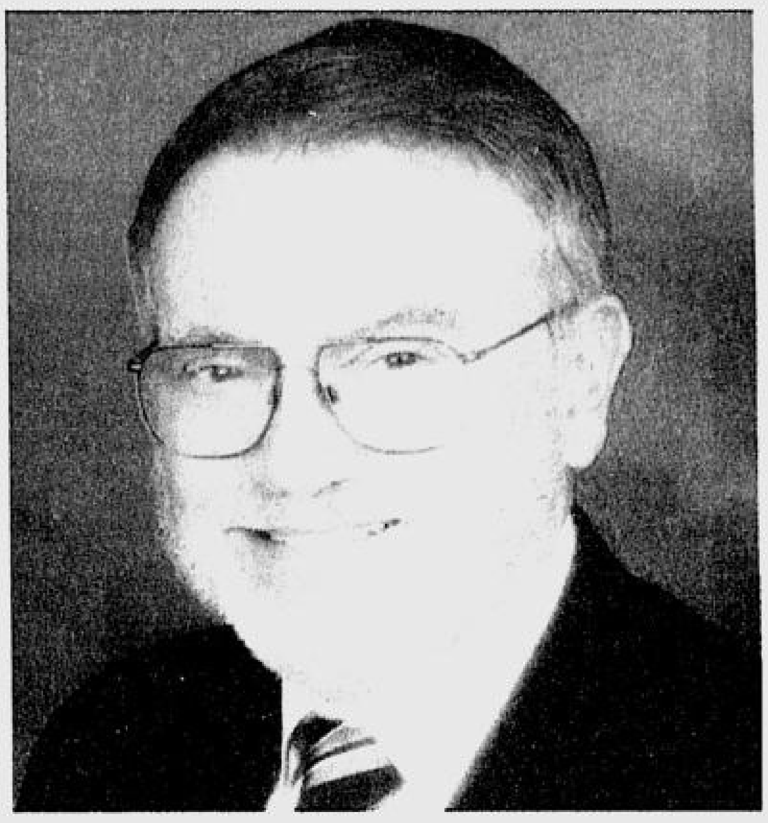
The chapter on hiring says that a sales manager should not hold off on recruiting until all the new recruits are fully trained. Malaghan adds that hiring only when a new salesperson is needed is not the right way to go. Further, he says that some managers think that the market is not big enough to justify a bigger sales force. Malaghan challenges this thinking. He says there are no reasons not to increase the sales force. According to Malaghan, while most jobseekers do not want work on a commission basis, there will always be those who do. Malaghan encourages managers to take advantage of this population.

In chapter eight of the book, Malaghan writes about how to exploit 17 proven recruiting techniques. When recruiting through newspaper ads for example, he advises to advertise what the jobseeker is looking for. "More leads than current sales force can handle," is one copy headline that Malaghan thinks as catchy. This ad proclaims that the company has more prospects than they can handle. All they need now are more salespeople to harvest this abundance.

Malaghan shares that customers are good hiring prospects. "Users or owners of a product bring heartfelt passion to selling that product because they are 'true believers' in its benefits. Enthusiasm and sincerity make for a powerful sales presentation." The chapter further discusses the different ways of recruitment like "help-wanted" signs, magazines, inserts, bulletin boards, job fairs and government job centers just to name a few.

Firing up the team

In September 1994, Malaghan promised his leadership team that he would not retire until he had made millionaire out of at least 10 people in his group. In addition, he discussed almost impossible sales goals that would scare any salesperson. "But, it was the thunder of passion, the fervently expressed, undeniable belief we would prevail that riveted their attention, created credibility, and inspired conviction. The goal was there for the taking," counters the sales expert.

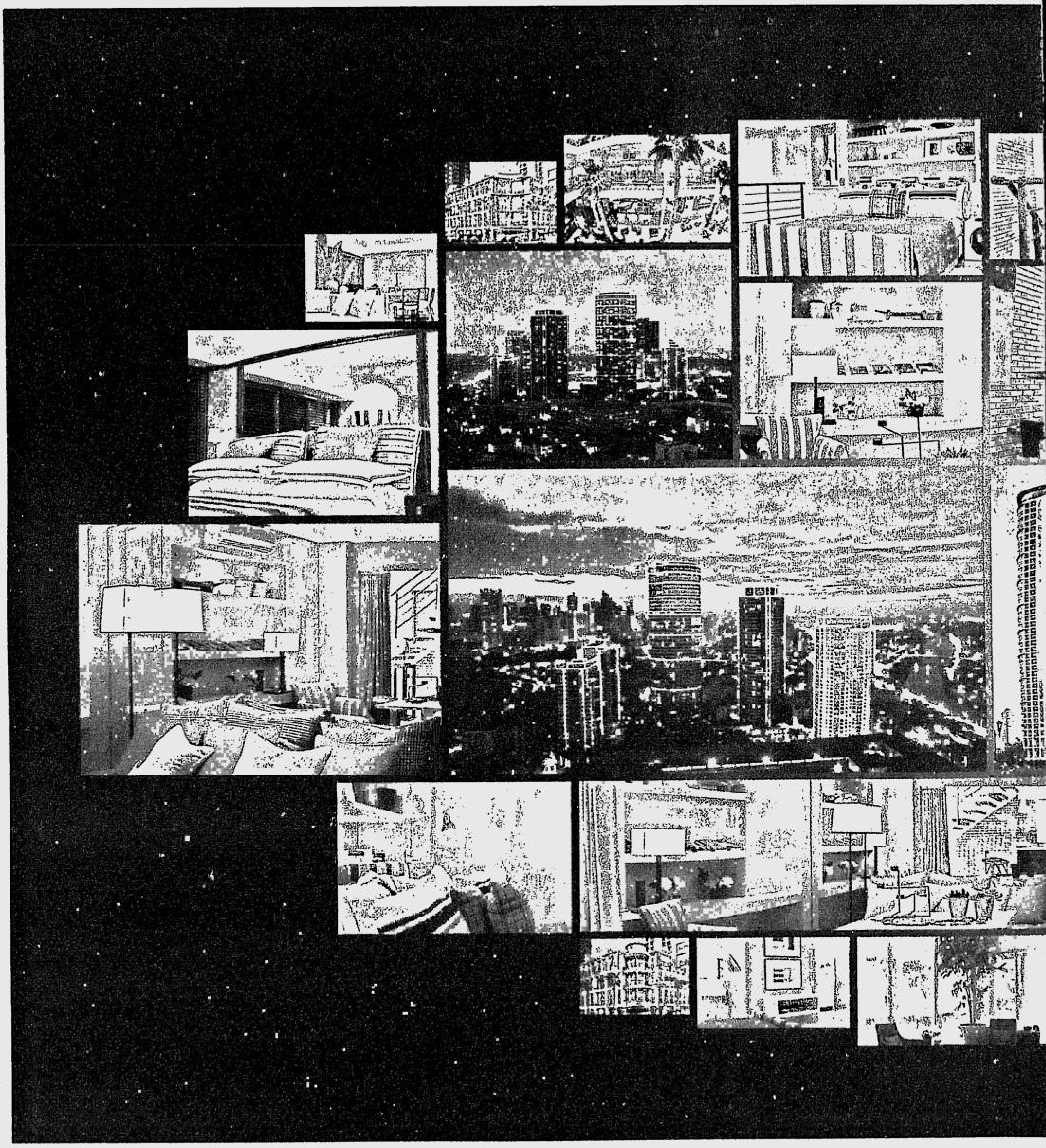


MALAGHAN

Malaghan exceeded his pledge. In just a few years time, he made over half of the team of fifty into millionaires. He credits a large part of this success to motivation. "Your example, enthusiasm, excitement, and positive attitude ignite the process. Everyone craves inspiration. Your job as sales manager is to respond to that yearning. You are a dream merchant."

Motivation for Malaghan is a step-by-step process. He says to start with taking personal responsibility. The second step is about living for a goal. He urges sales professionals to go back to daydreaming. "What would you truly, passionately like to do, to own, to achieve? This is not the time to be tentative or timid. The people you admire thought big, they had great dreams," he reminds.

Malaghan motivates his own people by engaging their hearts and their minds. He says there are many ways to do this. There is no way one can mass-produce motivation. Instead, as a manager, one must use judgment and experience to recognize what inspires a sales person. The book discusses the 14 key motivational factors that sales managers, or any type of manager for that matter, can apply to fire up their people. Recognition, job security, sense of belonging, friendly work environment and power are just some of the motivational factors that Malaghan explores. In the end he says, the best key motivator is one's self. "The best way to motivate people is to be motivated yourself."



Reboot your work life for the New Year

By Regina Galang Reyes

HAVE you ever experienced your computer "hanging" on you? You keep on frantically clicking your mouse, ferociously jabbing your keyboard but your computer refuses to respond. Then, a screen pops up and tells you the system is busy. Your only option then is to press the Alt-Ctrl-Delete buttons simultaneously so that your system is rebooted.

Well, sometimes, working is a lot like that. Paradoxically, when your mind "hangs" at work, it is because your "system" is too busy. And the only way you can get your "system" to work again is to "reboot" your work life. But like the computer, when you "reboot," you lose whatever "information" you are working on at the moment and start from scratch. The good thing is, you can regain control of your work and life.

Are your systems "hanging" but don't know it? Is your work life filled with meetings and appointments that contribute little to your work goals? Is your desk filled with paper that screams to be shuffled? Has frequent telephone calls already shattered your eardrums and disabled your listening capabilities? If you know exactly what I mean, then your answer to these questions is yes.

Then, it is time to "reboot" your work life. Here's what you can do to "Alt-Ctrl-Delete" your system back to productivity mode:

- Rethink your goals and program of activities for your work next year. To do this, visualize that you are handing in your resignation letter to your boss. Soon, everyone in your group finds out that you are leaving the company. What would they say about your resignation? Would your co-employees and superiors be sad that you would be leaving them? Would they feel that they would be losing a valued co-employee, one who helped them and the company? Or would they be glad and heave a huge sigh of relief that you chose to move on? What would they be saying about you when you finally exit the company door? Your reflections on these questions will show you how you can best serve in your capacity at work.

ILLUSTRATION BY DIONISIO BUCCAT

- Program a big chunk of time during the year to take time off from work to savor life's precious seconds in whatever way you choose. It can just be a two-hour breather during the day or a two-week rest or a two-year temporary retirement phase. The purpose of this time-out is to break your inertia of perpetually being in the motion of busyness. People sometimes usually think that inertia is the inability to move. But inertia really refers to "a property of matter by which it remains at rest or in uniform motion in the same straight line unless acted upon by some external force." When your system "hangs," it is because you are in "uniform motion" and thus you need to break this inertia by force.

- Notice that icon on your desktop that says "Recycle Bin?" Well, review the "files" of your daily activities and see which ones needs to be transferred to that bin. Rate the things that you do each day with an "excitement" scale. How alive do you feel when you perform that task? How enthusiastic are you in doing that work? How excited are you at the prospect of assuming that responsibility? A rating of five means the activity can bring back the passion for work into your life. If your activity rates one or two, stop doing it, pronto! Doing a task you are indifferent to or hate is torture not only to you but to all those around you who have to contend with your grumpy behavior.

- Who are on the "desktop of your work life?" Usually, the icons or folders you place on your computer's desktop are those you use often and consider important. Are the people who should be "icons" on your desktop there? Think hard, you might have been relegating to your drives C, D and E, people who should be on your desktop. Make sure you devote time for them and give them importance as you go about the activities that excite you. Put them on the "desktop of your work life" to make sure you do.

- Keeping sanity at work also means keeping a balanced life. Remember, your work does not define the essential you. Rather, you define your work. Therefore, make sure you have a life outside of work. At the end of the day, what matters most is not "living to work" but "working to live."

Rebooting your work life may "unwire" you a bit from all the things that are running your life. You may get to lose some things or start from scratch some projects next time around. But when your systems "hang," you know you've got no alternative but to restart and renew your work and life.

Ateneo CORD offers career development programs

ATENEO CORD (Center for Organization Research and Development) is offering three public programs this January. The Training Assistant Development Program is scheduled on Jan. 12 to 13, 2005. It is a two-day workshop designed to equip participants with skills in coordinating, preparing and documenting workshops. Talent and Career Management (formerly Leadership and Career Development) is another program scheduled on Jan. 17 to 21, 2005. It is a five-day course designed to equip participants with the necessary tools and skills for identifying, assessing and developing leaders in their organizations. Finally, the Measuring HR Effectiveness is scheduled on Jan. 25 to 28, 2005. This four-day program aims to provide participants with the concepts and techniques in evaluating HR programs and measuring the impact of HR on business outcomes.

For more information, contact Ateneo CORD, 2nd floor, Höffner Building, Social Development Complex, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City 1108 at telephone numbers (632) 426-5931, 426-6282, fax (632) 426-6065 or e-mail ateneocord@admu.edu.ph

Be part of People at Work

WOULD you like to be part of a family that can help you in your career growth and development? Join the People at Work community where members support each other in the quest for a better career and life. People at Work columnists, writers and editorial staff will also be part of this group to lend you a helping hand. Working professionals, jobseekers, human resource executives and practitioners, managers, trainers, consultants and all others willing to share and help are welcome to join. Members will have access to updates and discounts on People at Work events, advice from People at Work columnists and writers and other members, chat schedules with members and "eyeball" events. To join, send your name, gender, civil status, age, contact number, e-mail address, company name and position title (if applicable) to peopleatwork@inquirer.com.ph or fax to tel. no. (632) 938-2092 or text to 02-937-0376.

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Is your boss a friend?

From page B8

with your organization will be.

All in all, there are many benefits to having a good relationship with your boss. Other than having a more relaxed and happy work environment, it can lead you to be more productive and efficient at work. Good communication with your manager can make a job much easier as you can consult without fear of being humiliated or scolded. You can also learn many things from your manager once you have already established a good working relationship. Who knows, one day he or she may be the one to make a recommendation that will take your career to new heights.

For the unfortunate ones who do not have a good relationship with their boss, remember that managing your relationship with your boss is a two-way street. You need not wait for your boss to be the one to reach out to you first. Believe it or not, the top can be a lonely place to be. The next time your boss isn't in such a great mood, remember that he or she is also under great pressure and has his or her own big boss too. Not only can your boss be a friend to you, but you can be a friend to him or her too.

(Pineda is a graduate student in IO Psychology at the Ateneo de Manila University. E-mail feedback to ateneocord@admu.edu .ph.)

PEOPLE at WORK

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Is your boss a friend?

By Trina Pineda
Contributor

PEOPLE AT WORK *Pulse*

WHETHER you like it or not, in the world of work, there will always be bosses, supervisors or managers to report to. It is one of the workplace realities. Thus, your relationship with your boss affects the overall work environment and how you feel about your job. It can also be the basis for staying in a job or not. Motivation to work isn't all about money anymore. People need to be treated well and feel that they are valued by their organization. And this means that their relationships at work must fulfill this need, including their relationship with their boss.

According to a recent study presented by Ateneo Center for Organization Research and Development on employee retention, the quality of relationship with one's supervisor or manager is the most important factor that employees consider in deciding to stay or leave an organization. This is particularly true for Filipinos, who by nature, put a great deal of importance on dealings with other people and relationships in general. Filipino values like *pakikitungo*, *pakikisama*, and *pakikipagkapwa* are used to describe relationships with each other and with a bigger community. In a culture where people try hard to be pleasant to everyone, relationships can affect people's performance in the workplace.

This month's People at Work Pulse tackles the relationship between boss and subordinate. It answers the questions: Do subordinates consider their boss a friend? Would friendship affect their working relationship? What are the common activities that they engage in with their boss outside of work? A total of 37 people aged 24 to 46 and working in various industries responded to this People at Work Pulse survey.

Pros and cons

In this survey, 80 percent of respondents consider their boss a friend. In addition, 70 percent of them feel that being friends with their supervisors affect working relationships in a positive way. Being friends with the boss motivate them to work harder for the company. When the working atmosphere is light and relaxed, one can work efficiently and more productively. Open communication lines also help make the work easier and faster without fear of approaching one's supervisor for help or advice.

On the other hand, they also warn about being too chummy with the boss and taking advantage of your friendship with him or her. Subordinates may become opportunistic and abusive of the relationship. When performance evaluations roll around, it can also become disadvantageous for other employees when superiors judge not by merit but by friendship. So it is clear that certain limitations should be set before too much familiarity begins to breed contempt.

Bonding activities

In most workplaces, however, friendships between superiors and subordinates are encouraged since healthy relationships have been shown to create a harmonious and productive work environment. Friendships are developed inside the office naturally when working together or through human resource programs designed specifically to enhance work relationships, like team-building sessions. Informal activities in and outside the office can also help to nurture these relationships.

Chatting about personal lives seems to be one of the most common activities engaged in between supervisors and subordinates. Sixty-five percent also consider it acceptable and common practice in their workplace to ask their boss to be a sponsor at their wedding or to be a *ninang* or *ninong* (godparent) to their child. Eating out and attending parties together are also done occasionally. Playing badminton or other sports, watching movies, and shopping together, however, are less common activities between supervisors and subordinates.

Ideal boss

All these suggest that employees do feel the need for some kind of personal relationship with their boss. He or she would like their supervisor to know more than just what goes on in the office but also a bit of their personal lives as well. Employees dream of having a supervisor who has not only power in the company but also a heart for subordinates. An ideal boss is defined as someone who is respectful, considerate and understanding of subordinates. The boss should also be willing to share responsibility and credit and hence, be a good team player. Good communication is also essential to the boss-subordinate relationship, as shown in the survey.

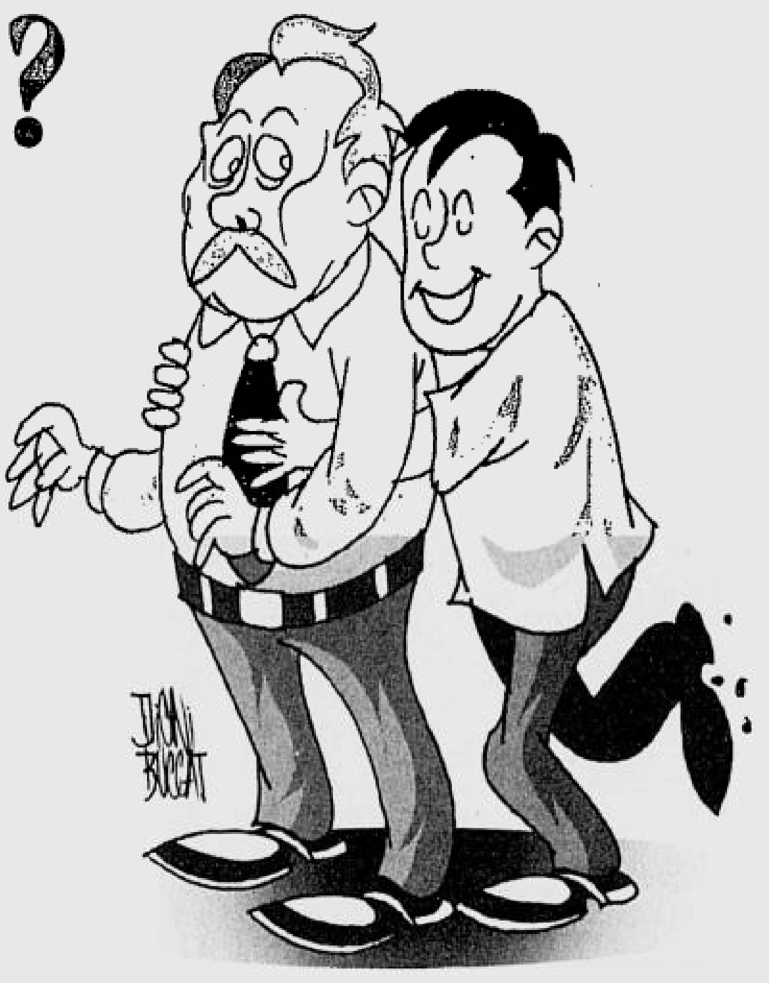
ILLUSTRATION BY DIONISIO BUCCAT

Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, authors of the book called "First Break All the Rules," wrote, "People leave managers not companies." In a study undertaken by the Gallup Organization, which surveyed over a million employees and 80,000 managers, it came up with a very relevant finding: that good people leave an organization because of their immediate supervisors. This just goes to show that your relationship with your boss can determine how long and happy your working life

IS YOUR/ B6

How to fire your current boss to go to work for yourself

DEAR WW: I've finally decided to leave the corporate world. I read in the bio on your website that you've started three corporations. What do I need to know to create my own business?

Fire The Boss

WORKING WOUNDED

Bob Rosner

It's a big leap from a cubicle to your own business, so it's wise to prepare. And when it comes to being prepared, the Danish army takes things to a new level. For example, when they were deployed to Iraq, where temperatures were hovering around 120 degrees, they carried their snow shovels into battle.

To ensure that you're prepared for the challenges that you'll actually face, I've included a series of questions below. For more, check out Larry Farrell's book "Getting Entrepreneurial" (Wiley, 2003).

What do you have passion for? Start by thinking about the things that you do when you lose track of the time. Or the work-related areas that you daydream about. Finally, ask the people who know you best to tell you where they think your passions lie.

What am I good at? This is the first question that most people ask themselves when they start thinking about becoming more entrepreneurial, but it's second on my list. Just because you are good at something doesn't mean that you have to turn it into a job. Sometimes it's best to pursue an opportunity that requires you to use your secondary skills or to develop new ones.

What customers and markets exist for your product or service? Ultimately, you won't have a business until you have customers. And remember, you can only find customers two ways: you can steal them from another business to yours, or you can create new ones by convincing people to buy something that they haven't bought before. Underestimating the challenge of growing a customer base is probably the biggest mistake that most new entrepreneurs make.

Is it the right time to start your business? Most entrepreneurs want to start their business immediately. Sometimes it's smart to give yourself time to get better financing, to line up vendors, to do more research, etc.

How much cash do you have? I'll never forget something my finance teacher told me during my MBA program: cash is more important than your mother. Sorry mom, but his point is well taken. You will always need more money than you think you'll need, so get access to as much cash as you can.

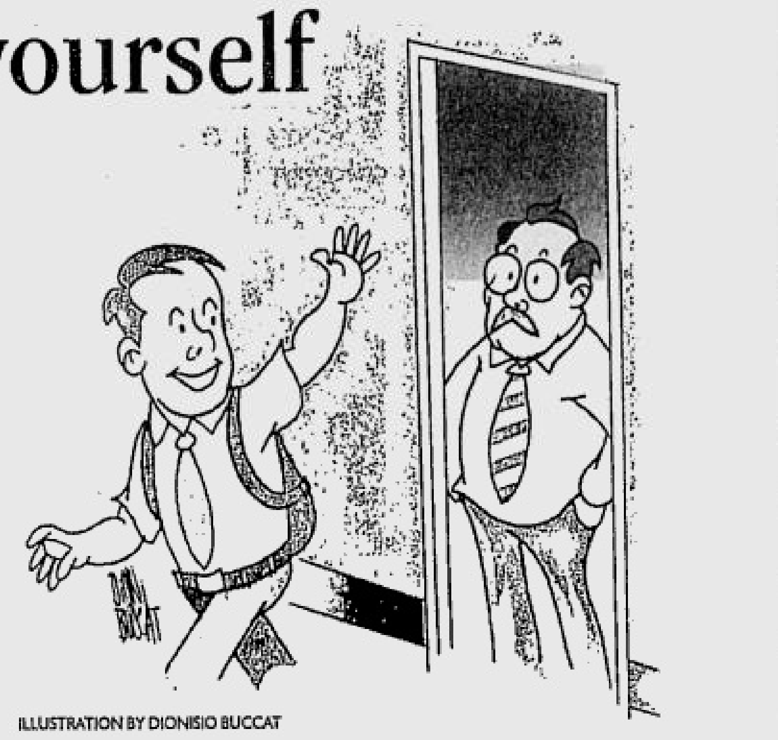
ILLUSTRATION BY DIONISIO BUCCAT

Do you have the drive to be an entrepreneur? Some people really need the structure of a job and the comfort of a regular paycheck. Can you motivate yourself? Can you make it through the dry spells that are a natural part of most new businesses? Talk to entrepreneurs that you know to see if you have what it takes.

The early days of your venture might just feel like shoveling sand, but if you keep at it you'll gain more insight about what you should be doing and how you should be doing it.

Here are the results from a recent workingwounded.com/ABCnews.com online ballot: What is most important to the success of an entrepreneur?

—Passion, 49.8 percent
—Customers, 21.7 percent
—Money, 14.4 percent
—Timing, 13.7 percent

(*Mr. Rosner, an internationally syndicated columnist, author and speaker, is based in Seattle, Washington, USA*. E-mail him at bob@workingwounded.com.)

Readers request info on business skills

By Tita Datu Puangco

Advice FOR THE ANXIOUS PERSON AT WORK

YOUR article last Dec. 12 certainly deserves a commendation. I share the same thoughts that a "rural revolution" is a must if we are to move forward as a nation.

I am an OFW based here in Bahrain and am now entertaining the idea of going back home for good. I have lived abroad for nearly half of my life. I am now yearning to live the remaining part in our own country.

In this context, I am interested in obtaining information on how your cousin succeeded in converting agricultural land to a fishpond and would also appreciate if you could provide details if you are still running "Business Skills for Everyone" so I can avail of it myself and find time for the learning event in my frequent trips to the Philippines.

Yours truly would be extremely grateful for any links to reading materials that can be obtained or procured pertaining to "Business Skills for Everyone" and your cousin's successful endeavor. Thank you and mabuhay!

OFW In Bahrain

You stated that you have a cousin who is a successful tilapia farmer. I hope you don't mind sharing me his name and location.

My dad, who passed away in 2002, left two professionally made dams that he used to raise tilapia. I have been researching and reading about tilapia raising and I think I have enough knowledge to start, but it would be nice to meet in person one who is in actual operation.

I have a degree in Business Administration and lived in a farm until I was 12 years old. I'm very determined to employ some people to better their lives. I truly believe I can make it. I always have been successful in everything where I put my heart and soul.

Your prompt reply is greatly appreciated.

Future Tilapia Farmer

Thank you for your letters. I am happy to note your desire to invest in the rural areas and your interest in tilapia farming. When I go home to the province for the Christmas season, I will get permission from my cousin to allow visits to his farm or communicate with you through e-mail. There are other sources of information on tilapia farming. You can try asking the Technology and Livelihood Resource Center based in Makati City.

We will be running the very successful "Business Skills for Everyone," once again in 2005. In fact, we are planning to have three runs, one in Metro Manila, one in Cebu and still another in Davao. We will inform you once we have firmed up the dates. We will also be completing soon the edited video documentation of the seminar we did this year. We will make them available in CDs and videos by early 2005.

Meanwhile, wishing you a blessed Christmas!

(*Ms Puangco is CEO and chair of Ancilla Enterprise Development Consulting. Send feedback through e-mail to* advice@ancillaedc.com.ph *or fax to* 892-2902.)

What's new in the office grapevine?

PEOPLE at Work and the Ateneo Center for Organization Research and Development (Ateneo CORD) partner to listen to the heartbeats of working people through this People at Work Pulse. The results of this "pulse" will be published the following month. To quicken your response rates, Philippine Daily Inquirer and Ateneo CORD will be giving gift packages to two respondents to be drawn from those who replied for the month.

PEOPLE AT WORK *Pulse*

Winners from respondents of last month's survey are **Ernesto Ramos Jr.** and **Francis Allan D. Suarez** (please contact Tere Cruz of the Philippine Daily Inquirer at 897-8808 loc. 554 to claim your prizes).

1. How often do you engage in gossip in your company?
___ Everyday
___ Once a week
___ Once a month
___ Rarely
___ Not at all

2. Do you think gossip is something inevitable in an organization?
___ Strongly agree
___ Agree
___ I don't know
___ Disagree
___ Strongly disagree

3. What is the usual topic of gossip in your organization? (Check all that apply)
___ Conflicts in the office
___ Promotions
___ Layoffs
___ Holidays
___ Bonuses
___ Office romance
___ New policies
___ The boss
___ Other employees
___ Others: ______________

4. What are the possible reasons why employees engage in gossip? (Check all that apply)
___ It's fun and makes life interesting
___ It keeps me up-to-date
___ It allows me to bond with my fellow officemates
___ The feeling of being "in the loop"
___ To express my opinion/desires
___ To hear different opinions of people
___ Lack of information from management
___ Others: ______________

5. What do you think the impact of gossip is? (Check all that apply)
___ None—it's harmless
___ Decreases productivity
___ Decreases morale of employees' concerned
___ Creates conflict
___ Improves employee relations
___ Provides management information about what employee think
___ Others: ______________

6. Who gossips more in the office?
___ Men
___ Women

Name: ______________
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Nature of Job: ______________
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Mail or fax this form or email or text your answers to:

People at Work Pulse, Ateneo Center for Organization Research and Development, 2nd flr. Hoffner Bldg., Social Development Complex Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

Fax to (632) 426-6065, e-mail to ateneocord@admu.edu.ph or text answers to (0920) 831-9522. Write: topic 1.(answer), 2. (answer), etc. name, gender, status, position, company, address, contact #s or e-mail.

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1.5% Fast Car Loan 6560140

1.5% w/oTaking Car 3650974/75

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CAR LOAN

1.5% w/oTaking Car 7228942-43

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2% w/oTaking Car 8966630/33

2% w/oTaking Car 8959454

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2% w/oTaking Car 3732081

2% w/out taking car 6567685

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PUBLIC NOTICES

ANNOUNCEMENT

To the registered owner of a 1994 4DR maroon Kia Pride plate #TJN 359 left at 170 Banawe St. QC with obligations. You are advised to claim car during ofc hours pls present proof of ownership settle obligations in 30days or we will dispose car to cover obligations by management Goldrich (PDI-Dec.15, 22 & 29, 2004).

NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY

Regional Office IV, Balagtas, Batangas City
Tel. No. (043) 723-3325, (043) 402-0428, & (043) 300-0165 / Fax No. (043) 723-0449
Website: www.nfa.gov.ph/E-mail: Address: nfaro4@batangas.net.ph

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID FOR 2005 SECURITY SERVICES OF NFA-REGION IV

The **National Food Authority**, Southern Tagalog Region invites all interested Private Security Agencies (PSA) with the following qualifications -

- ✓ with valid current regular/permanent license to operate issued by the Philippine National Police Security Agencies and Guards Supervision Division (PNP-SAGSD)
- ✓ which has been in operation for at least five (5) years
- ✓ which has neither been a respondent to NFA charges nor has it been a complainant against NFA in any court of law or administrative bodies (This also applies to sister companies.)

to apply for eligibility and to bid for security services to be provided in all NFA designated areas/ installations of each NFA Provincial Office within Region IV and corresponding Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) for each lot as follows:

LOT 1

PROVINCE	NUMBER OF GUARDS	ABC	SOURCE OF FUND	CONTRACT DURATION
Batangas/Lubang	41	P 5,548,380.00	LOCAL	ONE (1) YEAR
Infanta	12	1,487,880.00		
Laguna	28	3,126,000.00		
Palawan	37	4,352,160.00		
Quezon	15	2,035,440.00		
Total	133	P 16,549,860.00		

LOT 2

PROVINCE	NUMBER OF GUARDS	ABC	SOURCE OF FUND	CONTRACT DURATION
Mamburao	49	P 5,683,020.00	LOCAL	ONE (1) YEAR
Marinduque	8	927,840.00		
Occ. Mindoro	77	9,417,660.00		
Or. Mindoro	31	3,664,980.00		
Romblon	16	1,855,680.00		
Total	181	P 21,549,180.00		

NOTES:Interested PSA should participate in only one (1) LOT of his choice and sister company, if there is any, cannot apply.

PSA's whose value of largest single contract completed in 2003 and 2004 is less than 50% of above-cited ABC's (P16,549,860.00 for LOT 1 and P21,549,180.00 for LOT 2) need not apply.

The application forms, eligibility requirements and bidding documents may be secured on December 29, 2004 to January 11, 2005 during office hours from the Regional Bids and Awards Committee (RBAC) Secretariat at the Second Floor of NFA Office Building, Balagtas, Batangas City after payment of a non-transferable/non-refundable bidding fee in cash or cashier's/manager's check in favor of the NFA, amount of which is based on per Lot-ABC basis as follows:

Lot 1	P16,549.86
Lot 2	P21,549.18

The schedule of activities for this bidding are as follows:

1. Posting at G-EPS	29 December 2004
Schedule of Publication	29 December 2004 & 05 January 2005
2. Issuance of Eligibility and Bidding Documents	29 December 2004 to 11 January 2005 RBAC Secretariat, Second Floor NFA Office Building, Batangas City
3. Pre-Bidding Conference	17 January 2005 @ 10:00 AM NFA Conference Room, Third Floor NFA Office Building, Batangas City
4. Deadline of Submission of Eligibility Documents and Bids	04 February 2005 not later than 9:30 AM RBAC Secretariat, Second Floor NFA Office Building, Batangas City
5. Opening of Bids	04 February 2005 @ 10:00 AM NFA Conference Room, Third Floor NFA Office Building, Batangas City

The prospective bidders shall submit simultaneously three envelopes, one containing the eligibility requirements and two containing bidding documents. Contents of each of the bid envelopes are specified in the Instructions to Bidders.

The RBAC shall use a "Pass/Fail" criteria to determine the eligibility of prospective bidders. As such, non-submission of any of the eligibility requirements will result in the disqualification of prospective bidders.

Only eligible bidders can participate in the actual bidding. A single stage bidding two envelope system will be adopted using a simple pass/fail criteria for the evaluation of bid offers.

THE NFA RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ACCEPT OR REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS THEREOF, TO WAIVE ANY FORMALITIES OR DEFECTS FOUND THEREIN AND ASSUMES NO OBLIGATION WHATSOEVER TO COMPENSATE INDEMNITY TO THE BIDDERS FOR ANY EXPENSES THAT THEY MAY INCUR IN THE PREPARATION OF BIDS AND TO ACCEPT SUCH BIDS OR TO AWARD TO ANY CONTRACTOR WHOSE BID IS CONSIDERED MOST ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE NFA AND/OR TO THE GOVERNMENT.

For further inquiries, please contact RBAC Chairman Wilfredo O. Rendon at the NFA Regional Office IV, Batangas City at Tel. No. (043) 402-1878.

(Sgd.) **WILFREDO O. RENDON**
Assistant Regional Director
and Chairman, RBAC

(PDI - Dec. 29, 2004 & Jan. 5, 2005)

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Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT
Intramuros, Manila

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

(Re-Bidding)

The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) invites all interested bidders to participate in the re-bidding for the **"JANITORIAL SERVICES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT CENTRAL OFFICE FOR CY 2005"** with an approved budget for the contract of **P4,071,874.47 Pesos.**

Interested bidders must register and submit registration requirements to the Property Division, Administrative Service, 2nd Floor, DOLE Building, Muralla Street, Intramuros, Manila starting December 23, 2004. The checklist of requirements for registration shall be secured from the same office. Deadline for registration is on January 5, 2005.

Only bidders duly registered with the DOLE may be allowed to participate in the competitive bidding activities, to wit:

ACTIVITY	DATE	TIME	VENUE
Pre-Bid Conference	January 6, 2005	1:30 p.m.	Conference Room, 2nd Floor, DOLE Executive Building, San Jose Street, Intramuros, Manila
Submission of Eligibility Requirements	January 19, 2005	Between 1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.	– same –
Submission of Bids	January 28, 2005	Between 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.	– same –

Eligibility requirements shall be distributed during the Pre-Bid Conference or they can be secured on January 6, 2005 at the Property Division, Administrative Service, 2nd Floor DOLE Bldg., Intramuros, Manila.

Eligible Bidders are also enjoined to inspect the DOLE premises prior to the conduct of the Pre-bid Conference in coordination with the General Services Division, Administrative Service.

Eligibility documents shall be submitted to the DOLE Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) in a sealed envelope marked with "RE-BIDDING OF JANITORIAL SERVICES FOR CY 2005" and the name of the bidder in capital letters addressed to the undersigned on the date and time specified. Registered bidders are invited to witness the eligibility check on the said date at exactly 2:00 p.m. at the same venue.

Interested Bidders are requested to present their proposals, personally or through their authorized representatives, on the date of the re-bidding. The DOLE reserves the right to reject any or all bids, without offering any reason, waive any informality therein and make an award to the bidder whose bid is most advantageous to the Department. The DOLE assumes no obligation for whatever losses that may be incurred by the bidders in the preparation of bids, nor does it guarantee that an award will be made.

For further inquiries/information, please get in touch with Ms. Lily Pearl L. Guerrero and Ms. Liberty C. Angeles, members of the BAC Secretariat at telephone numbers 527-3480 and 527-3583.

20 December 2004

(Sgd.) Atty. **BENEDICTO ERNESTO R. BITONIO JR.**
Chairperson, Bids and Awards Committee and
Assistant Secretary

(PDI–Dec. 22 & 29, 2004)

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ASSET DISPOSAL PROJECT
NATIONAL POWER CORPORATION
Diliman, Quezon City

INVITATION TO BID

"AS-IS-WHERE-IS" FOR THE SALE OF NPC TUGBOAT NO. 2 & 3

DATE OF BIDDING: January 20, 2005

The National Power Corporation will received sealed bids on an "AS-IS-WHERE-IS" basis for the assets described below:

ITEM DESCRIPTION	MIN. BID PRICE
LOT 1: One (1) unit Unused Tugboat, 3000 PS (Tugboat No. 3) Length (Overall, without rubber fender/sheat : 33.30 meter (approx.) Breadth (molded) : 9.20 meter Depth (molded) : 3.90 meter Designed Load Draught (molded) : 2.90 meter Gross Tonnage (international) : 310.00 tons Loading Capacity : 80.00 tons (approx.) MAIN DIESEL ENGINES Make : Mitsubishi No. of Units : 2 units No. of Cylinder : 6 cylinders Max. Continuous Output : 1500 PS @1150 rpm Normal Output : 1350 PS @1110 rpm Acquired : 1996 Location : Naga, Cebu	P 38,685,000.00
LOT 2: One (1) unit Tugboat (Tugboat No. 2) Length (Overall) : 30.40 meters Beam (Molded) : 7.40 meters Draft Maximum : 2.30 meters Gross Tonnage : 180 tons Main Diesel Engine, 2 Units : Detroit 16V-92N 626 PS @ 1,800 RPM Generator Engine, 2 Units : Detroit, Type 4-71N 70KW @ 1,800 RPM Rated Output : 1,200 HP Manufacturer : President Marine Date Manufactured : 1994 Location : Naga, Cebu	P 38,773,450.00

Interested eligible bidders may obtain bidding documents upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **Five Thousand Pesos (PhP5,000.00)** at the Materials Management Department Office, Ground Floor, Building No. 1, National Power Corporation, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

Bids will be opened in the presence of bidders' representatives at **10:00 AM** on **January 20, 2005** at the NPC Solarium, NPC Head Office. Bids shall be accompanied by a Bid Bond (Cash or Manager's Check only) of not less than **ten percent (10%)** of the total amount to bid. The Power Sector Asset and Liabilities Management (PSALM) Corporation have concurred with the bidding process and clearance for the disposal was duly approved.

NPC reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, to waive any required informality, and to accept such bids that is most advantageous to the Government.

Issuance of bidding documents is on **January 3-15, 2005**. Additional information may be obtained from Asset Disposal Project office at telephone nos. 922-3970, and 921-3541 loc. 5582, or e-mail us at lcarabelo@napocor.gov.ph.

(Sgd.) LEVI C. ARABELO
Manager, BNPP Preservation & Disposal Project
& Chairman, Task Force for the Disposal of Tugboats 2&3

(PDI-Dec. 29, 2004, Jan. 3 & 4, 2005)

ASSET DISPOSAL PROJECT
NATIONAL POWER CORPORATION
Diliman, Quezon City

INVITATION TO BID

"AS-IS-WHERE-IS" FUEL TANK BARGE "T-228"

DATE OF BIDDING: 10 AM / JANUARY 20, 2005

The National Power Corporation will receive sealed bids on an "AS-IS-WHERE-IS" basis for the sale of the asset described below:

ITEM / DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	MINIMUM BID PRICE
Lot 1 - One (1) Unit, FUEL BARGE (Non-propelled), "T-228" Material of Hull : Steel Length Overall (LOA) : 82.00 meters Length between Perpendiculars (LWL) : 81.26 meters Breadth (molded) : 25.26 meters Number of Deck : Single Gross Tonnage (Approx) : 2,610 tons Net Tonnage (Approx) : 2,591 tons Fuel Barge Capacity : 40,000 barrels Date Launched : July 17, 1993 Shipbuilder Hull No. : 63	Batangas Coal-Fired Thermal Power Plant, Calaca, Batangas	P29,965,000.00

Interested eligible bidders may obtain bidding documents upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **Two Thousand Pesos (PhP2,000.00)** at the Materials Management Department office Ground Floor, Building No. 1, National Power Corporation, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

Bids will be opened in the presence of bidders' representatives at **10:00 AM** on **JANUARY 20, 2005** at the NPC Solarium, NPC Head Office. Bids shall be accompanied by a Bid Bond (Cash or Manager's Check only) of not less than ten percent (10%) of the total amount of bid The Power Sector Asset and Liabilities Management (PSALM) Corporation have concurred with the bidding process and clearance for the disposal was duly approved.

NPC reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, to wave any informality, and to accept such bids as may be deemed most advantageous to the Government

Issuance of bidding documents is on **January 3-15, 2005** For additional Information please call Asset Disposal Project at telephone nos. 922-3970, and 921-3541 loc. 5582, or e-mail us at lcarabelo@napocor.gov.ph

(Sgd.) LEVI C. ARABELO
Manager, BNPP Preservation & Disposal Project
& Chairman, Task Force on the Disposal of Fuel Barge

(PDI--Dec. 29, 2004, Jan 3 & 4, 2005)

A well established regional golf company urgently requires candidates for the following positions:

Product Development Assistant

- Bachelor's degree in any business course
- Articulate, competent, committed and consistent. Superb skills in communications, client relations and negotiation
- Computer literate and adept at research and the Internet
- Experience in developing consumer service products is an asset
- International driving license an advantage

Graphic Designer/Copywriter

- Bachelor's degree in any fine arts or mass communications course
- Able to conceptualize and design software based and freehand based creatives
- Knowledge of usual graphic design software and all office applications is an expected requisite.
- Web design skills are an advantage
- Strong writing skills. Experience as a writer is a strong advantage
- Presentable with good communication and presentation skills.
- Single female not more than 28 years of age

EVENTS ASSISTANT (PART-TIME)

- Experience in managing events is a plus but must have experience in working at trade shows or golf tournaments
- Pleasant looks and disposition (Must include photo) with good customer and client relations
- A bachelor's degree in any field is an advantage
- Single female not more than 26 years of age
- This temporary position is based in the Philippines
- Please quote expected remuneration on a per day and per month basis

CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER

- Must possess excellent telephone etiquette and have a pleasant disposition
- Call centre management experience an important advantage
- Committed, hardworking and excellent attitude
- Single female not more than 30 years of age

Important requirements:

- Candidate must be prepared to be posted in Singapore or any of our other regional offices and sign a minimum 1 year contract of employment
- A minimum of 5 years working experience is required
- All resumes must include expected gross salary and recently scanned photograph

Qualified candidates can email resumes to hr@oaag.com
Applications that do not meet the above requirements will not be considered.
Closing date for all applications is no later than **3rd January 2005**

OAAG (S) Pte Ltd
www.oaag.com

Republic of the Philippines
REGIONAL TRIAL COURT
11th Judicial Region
BRANCH 10
Davao City

IN THE MATTER OF: PETITION FOR THE DECLARATION OF STATE OF SUSPENSION OF PAYMENTS WITH APPROVAL OF PROPOSED REHABILITATION PLAN

CIVIL CASE NO. 7816-04

LAND CAR, INCORPORATED,
Petitioner.
x---x

STAY ORDER

By this PETITION, Land Car, Incorporated, a domestic corporation duly organized and existing under the laws of the Republic of the Philippines with principal place of business at Km. 4, Bajada, Davao City, seeks the approval of its Rehabilitation Plan attached to the petition as Annex "G".

Petitioner alleged that it is primarily engaged in the business of overland transportation of passengers and freight and secondarily, in the purchase, assembly and sale of motor vehicles and the rendering of auxiliary services appurtenant thereto It further alleged that it is a grantee of Certificates of Public Convenience to operate a bus line service in several areas.

Petitioner admits that it possesses sufficient properties to cover all its debts. Its total assets are worth P173,550,238.42 while its total liabilities amount to P142,036,295.22. It foresees its inability to meet its immediate obligations. If given a "breathing spell" or a temporary reprieve or moratorium from its immediate obligations falling due, it foresees a very good business future. It prays for the issuance of an order to stay all claims against it in the meantime that the rehabilitation plan is under consideration.

Finding the petition to the sufficient in form and substance, Myrna Papas Valdez c/o 11th Floor, Land Car Corporate Center, J.P. Laurel Avenue, Davao City, one of petitioner's nominees is hereby appointed rehabilitation receivor in accordance with the Interim Rules of Procedure on Corporate Rehabilitation, which took effect on **December 15, 2000**. She is required to post a bond hereby fixed at FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND PESOS (P500,000.00) in favor of Land Car, Incorporated to guarantee the faithful performance of her functions as receiver. She is directed to signify her acceptance or non-acceptance of this appointment within ten (10) days from receipt of this order.

The enforcement of all claims, whether for money or otherwise and whether by court action or otherwise, against the petitioner, its guarantors and sureties not solidarily liable with the debtor is hereby STAYED.

The petitioner is hereby prohibited from selling, encumbering, transferring or disposing in any manner of its properties except in the ordinary course of business

It is prohibited from making any payment of its liabilities outstanding as of the date of filing of the petition.

The suppliers of goods and services of the petitioner are prohibited from withholding supplies thereof in the ordinary course of business as long as the latter pays for services and goods supplied after the issuance of this stay order.

The petitioner is hereby directed to pay in full all administrative, liabilities to be incurred after the issuance of this STAY ORDER.

The initial hearing of this petition is hereby set on **January 27, 2005** at 8:30 a.m. The petitioner is directed to cause the publication of this Order in the Philippine Daily Inquirer once a week for two (2) consecutive weeks starting not later than seven (7) days from the issuance of this order.

All creditors and all other interested parties including the Securities and Exchange Commission are hereby directed to file and serve on the petitioner a verified comment on or opposition to the petition, with supporting affidavits and documents, not later than ten (10) days before the date of the initial hearing and putting them on notice that their failure to do so will bar them from participating in the proceedings.

The creditors and interested parties are hereby directed to secure from the Court copies of the petition and its annexes within such time as to enable themselves to file their comment and/or opposition to the petition and to prepare for the initial hearing on January 27, 2005, otherwise they will be barred from participating in the proceedings of this case.

SO ORDERED.

Given this 3rd day of December 2004, at Davao City, Philippines.

(Sgd.) VIRGINIA HOFILEÑA-EUROPA
Pairing Judge

(PDI - Dec 23 & 29, 2004)

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that **WESTERN SHIPPING SOUTH EAST ASIA, INC.** has filed an application with the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration for a license to engage in sea-based recruitment.

The following are the Company's stockholders, directors and officers:

MANUEL V. DAVID	President/Director/Stockholder
ROLANDO S. SY	Treasurer/Director/Stockholder
EVANGELOS KOSKINAS	Director/Stockholder
BENJAMIN T. BACORRO	Director/Stockholder
JUDY ANNE A. VERA	Director/Stockholder
DENNISON PHILIP T. TAN	Corporate Secretary

DENNISON PHILIP T. TAN
Corporate Secretary

(PDI-Dec. 29, 2004)

JOB OPENING FOR A SENIOR PROGRAM SPECIALIST

Competencies required:

- **research and evaluation skills** for satisfactory management of the Foundation's internal and external evaluation
- **Information management skills** for the continuing development and utilization of a customized computerized comprehensive program data base and a macro date base
- **analytical and creative skills** required for the production of synthesis reports and discussions with various stakeholders, particularly on the results of evaluation studies
- **supervisory skills** to effectively optimize the services of a Program Assistant
- **excellent communication knowledge and skills** to produce papers for internal as well as external dissemination including those that are intended for publication
- **human relations skills** to sustain as well as expand the Foundation's pool of consultants, technical service providers and other contacts to help promote the interest of the Foundation.

The applicant must have earned a graduate degree in the social science field or has completed all required units. Most importantly, the candidate must have at least five years of experience in research and evaluation. Actual work experience must include work i a non-profit organization for at least three years with excellent performance evaluation. It is also essential for the applicant to have a working knowledge of various computer applications and report generation. Application letter with resumé (attached to which is a 2x2 picture) should reach the following addressee not later than January 10, 2005.

The Nominations Committee
Consuelo Foundation, Inc.
27th Floor Citibank Tower
8741 Paseo de Roxas, Makati City 0702
through mail, fax: 848-0553, or e-mail: climpangog@consuelo.org.

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM
East Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City
Visit the SSS website for Bid Invitations

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY & TO BID

NETWORK EQUIPMENT, IBM RS6000 MAINTENANCE SERVICES & CONSTRUCTION WORKS

The **SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM** is inviting bidders to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following items:

1. Supply and delivery of the following Network Equipment:
   - 1.1 Four (4) units Core Switch
   - 1.2 Three (3) units Core Router
   - 1.3 Six (6) units Bandwidth Management
   - 1.4 Fifty-nine (59) units Edge Router
   - 1.5 Twenty-nine (29) units Switching Hub
   - 1.6 Ten (10) units LAN Modem
   - 1.7 System Management for all proposed Network Equipment
   - 1.8 One (1) Lot Fiber and Copper Patch Cord

   The aforementioned network equipment are aimed at replacing the deteriorating and malfunctioning units and, as well as, provide communication links to 10 new Receiving Centers and 6 new Processing Centers of the SSS.

   Approved Budget for the Contract:
   - Hardware/Software Cost : P44,000,000.00
   - 3-Year Maintenance Cost (For Purchase Option Only) : P13,200,000.00

   TOTAL : P57,200,000.00

   Source of Fund
   - Hardware/Software : CAPEX – Computer Systems
   - 3-Year Maintenance : Operating Expenses – M/R Computer Equipment

   Delivery Schedule Thirty (30) calendar days

2. Maintenance service requirements of its IBM RS6000 machines under various SSS projects.

   The aforementioned services are aimed at providing the SSS a preventive and proactive means of ensuring the reasonable level of performance of the said machines.

   Approved Budget for the 3-Year Contract : P21,127,868.26
   Source of Fund : M/R Maintenance & Repairs
   Contract Duration Three (3) years to commence within fifteen (15) calendar days after receipt of Notice to Proceed

3. Construction of the following SSS Branch Offices:

SSS Branch	Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC)	Source of Fund	Contract Duration
SSS Calamba, Laguna	P26,039,243.56	CAPEX – Building Construction	Six (6) months
SSS San Fernando, La Union	P22,740,362.44	CAPEX – Building Construction	Six (6) months

The scope of work covers civil, architectural/interior, electrical, mechanical, sanitary and other miscellaneous works to complete the project

Prospective bidders should be an accredited General Building Contractor with valid license and classification issued by the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) including registration and classification of contractors for government infrastructure

	PCAB License General Building Contractor	PCAB Registration Classification
SSS Calamba Building	Category A	Medium "B"
SSS La Union Building	Category B	Medium "A"

The prospective contractors shall have a minimum experience of five (5) years as General Building Contractor:

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Particulars	Date	Venue
Issuance of eligibility requirements (item#3 upon presentation of PCAB license)	December 22, 2004 to January 10, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg
Deadline of submission of eligibility requirements • Item #1&2 • Item #3	January 13, 2005 January 14, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg.
Issuance of Bidding Documents to Eligible Bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee, as follows: • Item #1 – P20,000.00 • Item #2 – P20,000.00 • Item #3 – P20,000 for each branch	January 19, 2005 January 20, 2005 January 21, 2005	BAC Secretariat, 6th Flr., SSS Main Bldg
Pre-bid Conference • Item #1 • Item #2 • Item #3	January 24, 2005 2:00 pm January 25, 2005 2:00 pm January 26, 2005 2:00 pm	Bidding Room, 6th Floor, SSS Main Bldg
Submission & Opening of Bids shall be announced and confirmed through a Bid Bulletin.		

For any inquiry, please call telephone numbers 922-2991 or 920-6401 local 5490/5491.

This bidding shall be governed by the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act No. 9184, otherwise known as the "Government Procurement Reform Act."

The SSS reserves the right to reject any or all bids without offering any reason, to waive any formality or technicality, and to award to any bidder whose proposal is deemed most advantageous to the SSS The SSS neither assumes any obligation for any loss whatsoever that may be incurred by the bidders in the preparation of their respective bids, nor does the SSS guarantee that an award will be made.

THE CHAIRMAN
BIDS & AWARDS COMMITTEE

(PDI-Dec. 29, 2004)

Supreme Court
of the Philippines

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Supreme Court invites authorized Distributors/dealers of branded Personal Computers to pre-qualify and participate in the lot bidding for the following:

A. 936 units - Personal Computers
B. 54 units – Laser Printers
C. 1,043 units – Dot matrix printers (Narrow carriage 80 columns)
D. 22 units – Wide carriage 136 columns
E. 936 units - AVR, 500 watts

For distribution and delivery to:

Court	PC	Laser Printer	Dot Matrix (80 Columns)	Dot Matrix (136 Columns)	AVR (500 watts)
Supreme Court	90	54	65	20	90
Lower Courts	846	–	978	2	846
Total	936	54	1,043	22	936

The approved budget is **SIXTY EIGHT MILLION PESOS (P68,000,000.00)** to be charged against the Judiciary Development Fund.

The winning bidders shall deliver the required equipment within sixty (60) calendar days upon receipt of Purchase Order (P.O.).

Interested bidders must not be related to the head of the procuring entity or to any members of the Committee on Bids or COB Secretariat either by consanguinity or affinity up to the third civil degree.

Prospective bidders may secure pre-qualification requirements and bid documents including the list of recipient Courts and their locations from the Secretariat, Committee on Bids, 4th Floor, Multi-purpose Bldg., Property Division, Supreme Court, after payment of a non-refundable fee of Five Thousand Pesos (P5,000.00). For additional information, contact the Secretary, Atty. Ennar RC Cabanilla at telefax no. 5251270 or Norma Josue at telefax no. 5247425.

I. PRE-BID CONFERENCE

The Pre-Bid Conference will be held on 12 January 2005 at 2:00 p.m., Session Hall, 3rd Floor, Old Building, Supreme Court.

II. SUBMISSION OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The legal requirements for eligibility of prospective bidders must be personally submitted by the duly authorized representative on 19 January 2005 at 2:00 p.m., Session Hall, 3rd Floor, Old Building, Supreme Court.

III. OPENING OF BIDS

Bids of eligible bidders will be accepted and opened in the presence of the bidders or their representatives on 26 January 2005 at 2.00 p.m., Session Hall, 3rd FLoor. Old Building, Supreme Court.

The Committee on Bids reserves the right to reject any or all bids, waive any defects or informalities therein, or accept any bids/s or offer/s which it may consider to be advantageous and beneficial to the government.

December 23, 2004.

(Sgd.) JOSE P. PEREZ
Chairman
Committee on Bids

(PDI-Dec. 29, 2004 & Jan. 5, 2005)

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"...absent from the body to be present with the Lord."

— 2 Corinthians 5:8

CONCEPCION D. DADUFALZA

16 December 1922 – 26 December 2004

We, her loving brothers and sisters, **Natividad, Arturo, Conrado, Violeta** and **Estrella,** and her nephews and nieces entrust her to God our Father and enjoin all her friends to pray for her.

Her wake is at Loyola Memorial-Marikina. Necrological services will be held following the Mass at 8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 29, at the U.P. Chapel of the Holy Sacrifice, Diliman.

Further details will be announced later.

"Let the words of my mouth meet your Favor, keep the thoughts of my heart before you, Lord, my rock, my redeemer..."

— Psalm 21:15

Dearly Beloved

CARLO PALANCA GUTANG

Joined his Creator on 27th December 2004
at the age of 29.

His parents **BGeneral & Mrs. Rodrigo B. Gutang,** AFP (Ret), his brothers **Marco, Chris, RJ, Randy, JR,** sister **Tanya,** his aunts **Sister Vicky, Boots, Chat, Suzette, Susay, Beth, Manang, Sosay, Memeng, Inday;** uncles **Danny, Amed, Jun** and other relatives and friends request for your kind prayers for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Shrine, Doña Juana Rodriguez Avenue, Quezon City.

Holy Mass will be celebrated at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, December 31, 2004 at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Shrine. Cremation will follow at La Funeraria Paz Crematorium Araneta Avenue, Quezon City at 12:00 noon.

Please omit flowers. We will highly appreciate your donation to the CPG Motor Sports Foundation, Inc. for the welfare of his associates in motor sports.

REMEDIOS REYES ELAZEGUI

of Calamba City

Died in the Grace of our Lord
on December 27, 2004 at the age of 88.

Her loving sister and brother
Serafina Elazegui Reventar and **Magdaleno Reyes Elazegui** (USA)

Her deceased sisters
Rosario Elazegui Malabanan and **Trinidad Elazegui Dantis**

Her nieces and nephews
Edgardo E. Malabanan, Elizabeth E. Malabanan, Rolando & Mely E. Reventar, Rodolfo & Irene E. Reventar Jr. (Canada), **Raul** (†) **& Mariquit E. Reventar, Ruben & Marlene E. Reventar** (USA), **Cecilia Jardin** (USA), **Celso & Lety Dantis, Margarita Elazegui** (USA), **Angelita & Moises Morales, Gerardo & Divina Elazegui, Delilah & Vedasto Buhay** (USA), **Antonio & Josette Elazegui** (USA), **Leopoldo & Irene Elazegui** (USA), **Evelina & Jet Mercado, Nora & Ricky** (†) **Busalpa, Orlando & Liza Elazegui** (USA), **Emma Elazegui** (USA), **Luis Elazagui** (USA) and **Amelita Elazegui** (USA).

Her remains lie in state at the Laguna Memorial Chapels, Calamba City.

Interment will be today, December 29, 2004
at Calamba Catholic Cemetery, Chipeco Avenue
after the 2:00 p.m. Mass at St. John the Baptist Church.

CARIDAD G. MANUEL

January 30, 1923 - December 25, 2004

Peacefully joined our Creator
on December 25, 2004 at the age of 81.

She is survived by her loving husband **Brig. Gen. Gil L. Manuel** (Ret.), children **Jerry, Ricky, Dinah, Edgar, Belen** (†), **Cynthia, Cecile, Debbie, Marco;** sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren, great grandchildren, relatives and friends request pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at Mt. Carmel Shrine (Doña Juana Rodriguez Ave., New Manila, QC).

Interment will be tomorrow, December 30 at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City after the 7:30 a.m. Mass.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your departed loved one.

Always caring...
INQUIRER OBITUARIES

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS:
❶ Copy of Death Certificate
❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

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Most Rev. Jose F. Oliveros, D.D.
The Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Malolos Extend their sincerest prayers and condolences to the relatives and friends of

REV. FR. ELISEO PEREGRINO

who peacefully joined his Creator, our Loving Father
on December 26, 2004.

His remains lie in state at their residence in Barangay Panamitan, Kawit, Cavite.

A requiem Mass will be offered on Monday, January 3, 2005 at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon, at the Parish Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Kawit, Cavite.

"Living or Dying, Lord Jesus, I would be Yours,
Keep me Your own forever.
Draw me day by day nearer to You
Until I am wholly filed with your Love."

CLASSIFIEDS

Bolbok festival: A celebration of giving

BOLBOK FESTIVAL. Students from public and private schools in San Juan, Batangas participated in the street dancing presentation, which is one of the highlights of the Bolbok Festival. The event was launched during the 156th Founding Anniversary celebration of the town last December 12, 2004.

HUNDREDS of people flocked the street of San Juan, Batangas last weekend to celebrate its very first festival, which was named after the town's original name, Bolbok, which means bubbling spring. The activity coincided with the 156th founding anniversary of this fast growing municipality.

Among the highlights of the event are street dancing parade, pabitin (goods suspended in the air, that are up for grabs) and the *basagan ng palayok* (smashing of clay pots, holding gift prizes written on pieces of rolled papers).

Sponsorship of prizes came not only from the affluent resort owners and businessmen, but also from small time merchants like the market vendors whose contribution also gave a smile to the people of San Juan.

San Juan, Batangas has been known for its white sand beaches, Asia's largest aquarium, *lambanog,* and pottery. It is also the home of the Philippine Teak which is an endemic hardwood locally called "malabayabas", it grows on Mt. Daguldul, one of its protected area.

San Juan, Batangas is accessible by land, travel time to the place will only take three hours from Manila. The town is currently promoting eco-tourism with its emerald green mountain and hot springs.

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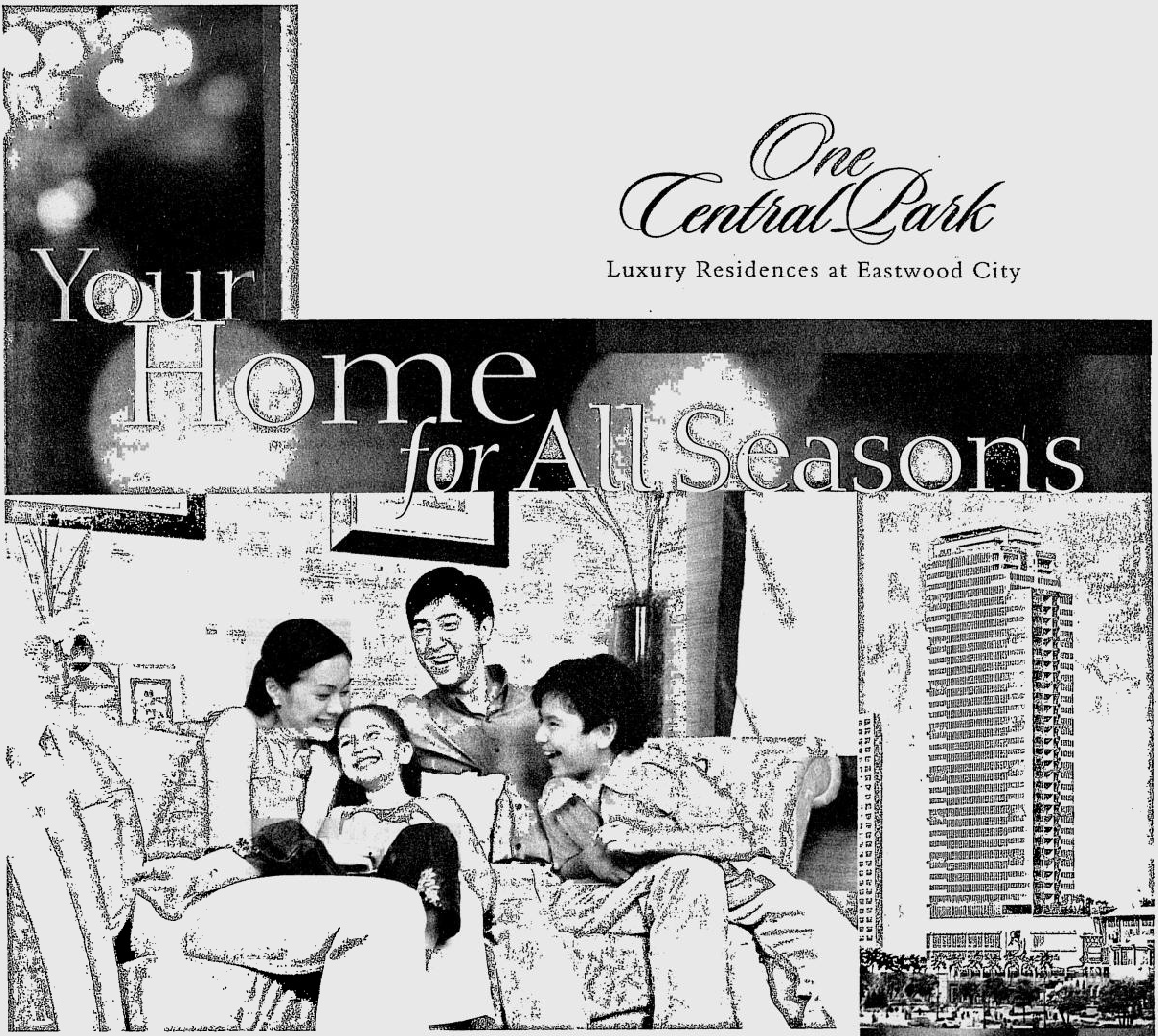

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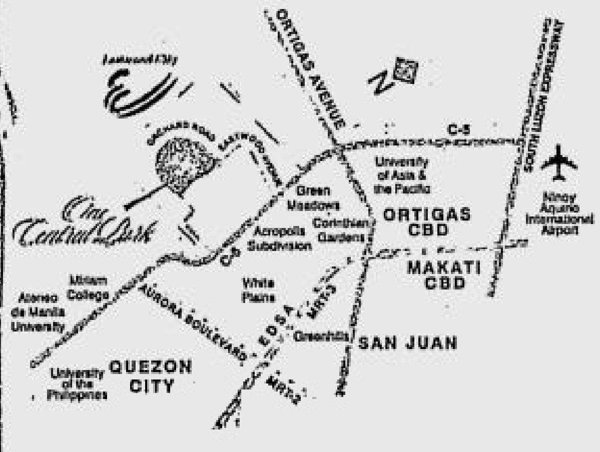
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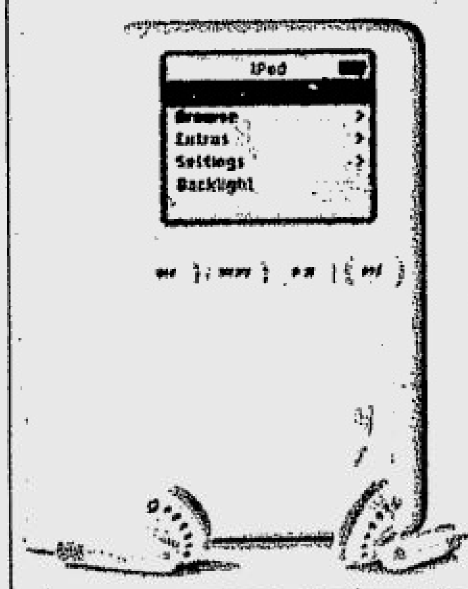

Rewind 2004

2bU! turns back the clock and reviews the year that has just passed.

Here are the winners and losers in music, fashion, technology and sports, along with the people who made 2004 the great year that it was.

Chuck Taylors, ponchos, 'Mean Girls,' Kitchie Nadal, Black Eyed Peas, Alicia Keys, Nokia 7610, Apple iPods, The Terminal, Shrek 2, Ethel Booba, Jennifer Rosales, Gonuts Donuts...

This is more than just a newspaper issue, it's a time capsule.

PARIS
Hilton

JANET Jackson and Justin Timberlake

The year that was in music

By Maui V. Reyes
2bU! Correspondent

BAMBOO exploded into the music scene, Britney got married twice, and Beyonce got back with her Destiny's Child sisters for a disappointing third album. 2bU! puts our CD players on pause and takes a look back at some of the highlights in music this past year.

Breakout local acts. The Pinoy music scene is finally getting the recognition it deserves. From hip-hop acts who burst into our MTV screens (Dice & K9) to guitar-wielding beauties (Kitchie Nadal), people were finally opting to purchase OPM over hyped-up foreign acts.

EMI Philippines bagged a biggie when Bamboo signed up with their label, and Sony Music Philippines scored a major one by offering multiple independent bands sweet distribution deals: Kjwan, Sponge Cola, and the Cebu-based rock band Cattski found new homes with Sony while still maintaining the copyrights to their songs.

Mayonnaise, an independent college band that had its first 15 minutes of fame at Fete dela Musique last year, won first place at the Red Horse Muziklaban challenge.

The acoustic phase slowly sizzled out as emo quickly slinked its way into the music scene with bands like Typecast and Plane Divides the Sky.

Major releases

Lots of albums rocked many a car stereo this year. The beginning of the year saw fans spinning Incubus' "Megalomaniac" and Linkin Park's "Meteora." Pop tarts danced their hearts out to Britney's "In the Zone" (released late last year) and bounced with Usher's "Confessions."

Sponge Cola, as we predicted last year, won over hundreds of fans with the release of their album, "Palabas." Sugar Free gave us even more songs to sing along to with "Dramachine," and Cambio finally released their long-awaited LP, "Derby Light." South Border released "Episode 3", and Imago shelled out their newest record, "Take 2."

We rejoiced when we heard Robert Smith's voice once again on the radio with The Cure's new album, and Gwen Stefani's solo debut, "Love, Music, Angel, Baby," simply rocks.

New wave with a vengeance. It's rock you can dance to—new wave makes a comeback with bands like Jet, Franz Ferdinand, The Stills, and Interpol.

THE YEAR/ C3

KITCHIE Nadal

LINDSAY Lohan

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PLDT MyDSL Plan 2500	Up to 512 Kbps	Php 10,999	Php 9,001 or 45%
PLDT MyDSL Plan 3000	Up to 768 Kbps	Php 8,999	Php 11,001 or 55%

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Mechanics
1. Promo is available at the following SM Malls: Megamall, North Edsa, Southmall, Centerpoint and Lucena.
2. Promo period is from December 24, 2004 to January 9, 2005.
3. A lock-in period of 24 months or two (2) years is required for PLDT myDSL.
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5. Should the applicant decide to terminate the service within the lock-in period, a three (3) month MSF depending on subscribed PLDT myDSL plan plus the discount/savings shall be charged.
6. Get the FREE printer when you purchase a Black and White ink cartridge (P950) or a Colored ink cartridge (P1200). The printer can be claimed at the PLDT Business Office.

SEE FLYERS FOR DETAILS

Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 3427, Series of 2004

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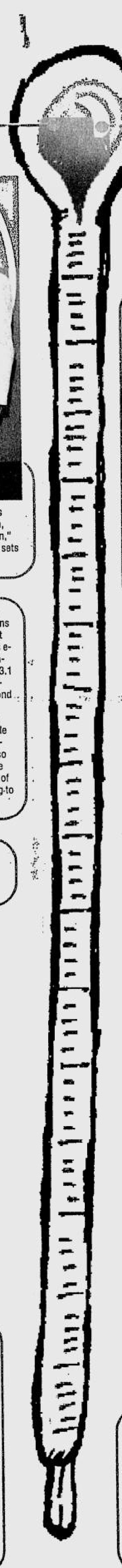
THE 2BU! YEARENDER READER SURVEY

Only the best of 2004

The ballots are in, the counting is over. Presenting this year's winners, according to you

LET'S face it—our world has enough negativity to deal with this season. So we have decided to do away with a roster of 2004's worsts—our own way of spreading a little positive vibe before this year ends.

But who knows, next year, we might bare our fangs again.



BEST BAND. Four bands ruled this year—the Black Eyed Peas, Bamboo, Kjwan and the constantly evolving South Border.

BEST SONG. You guys couldn't make up your mind, could you? We've got four big hits from 2004—the Black Eyed Peas' "Where Is the Love?" which became this year's anthem, Alicia Keys' masterpiece "If I Ain't Got You," Kitchie Nadal's "Wag na Wag Mong Sasabihin," which is still getting a lot of airplay, and South Border's "Rainbow," the uplifting tune that sets the mood for a lot of people.

BEST SINGER. No doubt about it, there was a lot of love for Alicia Keys and Kitchie Nadal.

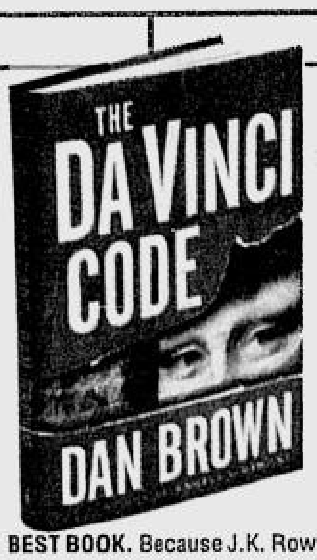
BEST RADIO STATION. RX fans must have spent sleepless nights e-mailing us. Monster Radio RX 93.1 is again the winner, for the second year in a row.

BEST RADIO DJs. It's a double victory for Monster Radio. Chico and Delamar are king and queen of radio, according to our readers.

BEST MUSIC VIDEO. People loved the videos of the Black Eyed Peas.

BEST ALBUM PACKAGING. Kjwan's CD got the thumbs up.

BEST CONCERT. She rocked, she really rocked. The Diary of Alicia Keys World Tour won by a landslide.



BEST BOOK. Because J.K. Rowling abandoned you this year, you guys settled for The Da Vinci Code.

BEST WRITER. No surprise here, it's Dan Brown.

BEST MAGAZINE. Preview's pages keep you captivated.

BEST RESTAURANT. Cibo has reclaimed its throne as best food heaven.

BEST DISH. Apparently, 2bU! readers were among those lining up for the yummy, almost Krispy Kreme-like Gonuts Donuts. Amazing Glaze or Pastillas De Leche?

BEST FAST FOOD. McDonald's and Jollibee are still on top of the list.

BEST ATHLETE. They've done us proud, we all agree. Manny Pacquiao and Jennifer Rosales are this year's best athletes.

BEST UAAP TEAM. The De La Salle Green Archers have stolen the title from last year's victors.

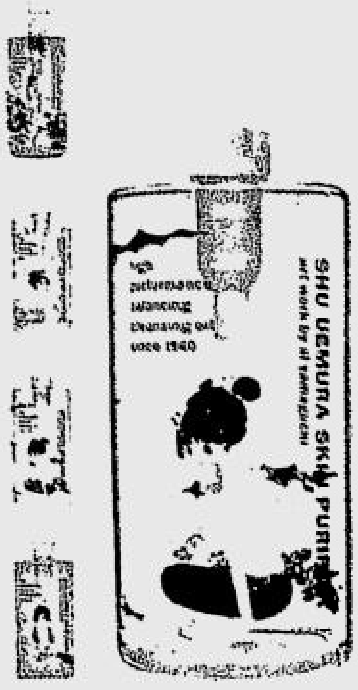
BEST NCAA TEAM. Still roaring. The San Beda Red Lions won again this year.

BEST COMMERCIAL. Samsung and Bailey's commercials kept our hands off the remote.

BEST TV ACTOR. It's not just Lindsay Lohan and Hilary Duff. You love Chad Michael Murray too.

BEST VJ. Sarah Meier keeps you happy.

BEST MUSIC CHANNEL. MTV, you like.



BEST BEAUTY PRODUCT. Shu Uemura is a big winner—you people love their eyelash curler and cleansing oils.

BEST TV SHOW. Thank god for cable TV. The Amazing Race, The O.C., The Simple Life and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy kept your eyeballs glued to the screen.

BEST ACTOR. People loved Tom Hanks as The Terminal's Viktor Navorski.

2
SPIDER-MAN

BEST MOVIE. Your choice—a web-flinging superhero, a lovable ogre or a charming Eastern European man trapped in a foreign airport? Spiderman 2, Shrek 2 and The Terminal are big winners for 2004.

BEST MALL. Oh yes, you love this mall. Glorietta is still your favorite shopping destination.

BEST MOVIE THEATER. It's a tug-of-war between the Greenbelt 3 and Eastwood Cinemas.

BEST MALE MODEL. Borgy, Brent, Borgy. Borgy Manotoc and Brent Javier are this year's victors.

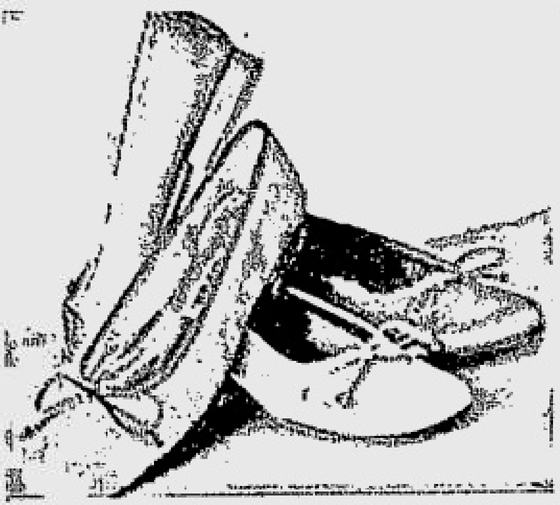
BEST FEMALE MODEL. Nicolette Bell ruled the polls of 2004.

BEST FASHION DESIGNER. We adore her—and apparently, you do too. Kate Torralba rocked this year's ballots.

BEST BRAND. No surprise here, Bench is still number one, according to you.

BEST SHOP. People R People, Bench, Tango and Terranova are your must-stops at the mall.

BEST ACTRESS. Uma Thurman used The Five Point Exploding Heart Technique to bring herself to victory. You guys adored her as Beatrice in Kill Bill Vol. 2.



BEST TREND. Just like last year, mini skirts are still big—but this year they've gotten colorful and even shorter. And this year, you've been wearing them with fab ballet flats.

BEST ACCESSORY. 2004 was a year for brooch bonanza. And we bet this is gonna get even bigger next year.

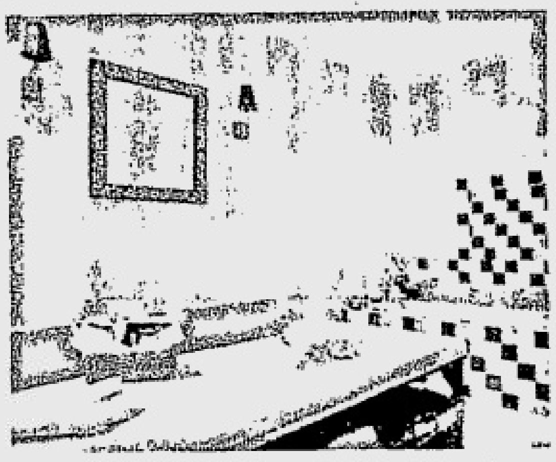
BEST SALON. Bench Fix is still unbeatable.

BEST HAIRSTYLE. Still long and straight for girls and messy chic for men, whatever that means.

PARIS Hilton

BEST FASHION ICON. Forget her porn video, you actually like Paris Hilton for her sense of style.

BEST FITNESS REGIMEN. You still haven't turned your back on your rackets—badminton is still your favorite way to keep yourselves fit. And you gave the South Beach diet a thumbs up, too.



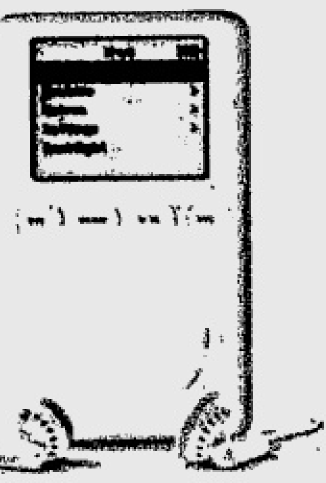
BEST SPA. Urban Spa and Nail Spa are your chosen relaxation havens for this year.

BEST WEBSITE. So you're still searching for long-lost friends, huh? Friendster.com is still on top of your favorite links.

BEST GAME. People are still addicted to Ragnarok.

BEST TV ACTRESS. Variety is the key. Mischa Barton, Ethel Booba and Sandara shone this year.

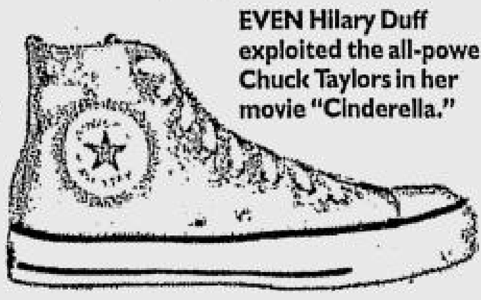
BEST GAGDET. Nokia 7610 and the Apple iPod (in any color, in any size) are your must-have gadgets for this year.



"MEAN Girls" did not just create waves for Lindsay Lohan, it also made a big mark on fashion.

RACERBACKS can be worn with everything.

THE UBIQUITOUS halter top



EVEN Hilary Duff exploited the all-powerful Chuck Taylors in her movie "Cinderella."

GOODBYE, chiffon. 2005's ponchos are knitted and way functional.

What girls loved in 2004

By Bianca Consunji
2bU! Correspondent

THE PAST year had trends coming and going as quickly as Typhoon Yoyong, but with a lot less impact. They were readily forgotten as soon as a new one came along.

Comfort became a major factor in fashion. Stilettos were ousted by flip-flops and sneakers, and cotton tanks replaced by spandex tube tops.

Once again, Hollywood played a big role in determining styles with trend-setting teenage movies. Girls rejoiced as unabashedly feminine fashion took over the shelves.

Here's a recap of the year's most widely followed trends, and check if you've followed any (or all) of them.

Ribbons, bows and ruffles

Along with floral prints, these feminine embellishments marked the start of summer and stayed for a few months. Tube tops, halters, dresses—every retail store had its own version of the basic white top with floral print and ribbons. After a while, store displays started to look alike.

WHO doesn't have a pair of Havaianas?

Racerbacks. From the gym to the malls, virtually every girl had a racerback tank top on, despite less-than-toned arms and unappealing rashes on some backs. The popularity of this top could be due to its versatility—it could be worn with jeans, shirts, skirts, and shorts, give or take a few accessories.

Loose tube tops. Although they were introduced to the public some time ago, loose tube tops didn't get as widely accepted as recently, probably because they tended to make some people look like a *labandera*. Now, they're more figure-friendly due to the material used—stiffer fabric--so the top skims the figure instead of hugging bulges, which the unforgiving Lycra does.

Chuck Taylor sneakers

For many rock fans, Chucks have never really lost their appeal, but to hordes of trend-followers, they were the shoes to have this year. Even Hillary Duff exploited the popularity of the shoe in her (shudder) Cinderella movie.

Aside from the classic reds and blacks, Converse came out with bright, girly colors such as pink and lime green for fashionable teenyboppers.

Havaianas. Who doesn't have a pair of Havaianas? When these rubber slippers first became popular at the start of the year, many dubious shoppers dismissed them as overpriced Beachwalks/Spartans. However, as the year progressed (and more models and celebrities started wearing them), sales of the comfortable flip-flops skyrocketed and more styles and colors were introduced.

The 'Mean Girls' look

Pleated miniskirts, loose curls, huge doses of pink, and bitchiness ruled again following the release of the Lindsay Lohan movie that completely pushed "Clueless" off the DVD shelf. High school girls started prowling the malls in perfectly coordinated, skimpy *barkada* outfits that would put Paris Hilton to shame. But then again, maybe not.

'80s-inspired items. Thankfully, the '80s comeback didn't involve shoulder pads, Aquanet, and contoured cheeks, although it did bring back glaringly neon plastic accessories, off-shoulder tops and multicolored socks. High-waist, tapered pants were reintroduced to the thong-flashing crowds, but got a noticeably lukewarm reception. Britney probably isn't wearing high-waist pants yet.

Metallic bags. Not content with flashy accessories, the fashionable set decided to take metal to another level by putting it on their bags. Metallic bags, especially gold ones, were the things to tote around to parties. Thankfully, most of the bags were more than palm-sized, so girls could bring their phones, wallets, and enormous *kikay* kits along.

Brooches

These bejeweled babies took the place of the huge cabbage rose that used to be so popular eons ago—girls bought elaborate replicas of what used to be grandma's staples and put them on coats, shirts, skirts, and bags. But retailers came up with a way to make the relatively expensive brooches more accessible to the masses—see those *tiangge*-bought sequined flowers people wear with baby tees? You're looking at a watered-down version of the brooch.

The return of the poncho and bolero. For the past couple of months, ponchos and boleros have been occupying space on the store shelves again. But this time around, ponchos aren't the flimsy chiffon things they were back in 2002—lots of them are knitted, warm, and actually functional. Worn with jeans instead of formal dresses, they became more versatile as compared to before.

E-mail the author at biancaconsunji@yahoo.com

The year that was in music

From page C1

We can't sing but we look pretty. Hilary Duff released her second album this year, and Lindsay Lohan followed closely with her subtle-skanky video, "Rumors." Next up: Paris Hilton, with her , club-worthy dance track, "Screwed." And Jessica Simpson's wide-eyed younger sister Ashlee was caught lip-synching on Saturday Night Live.

Independent releases

This is what rocks about a distribution deal: You record an album with your own money, get to pick which songs get on the record and which art to use, then get a major label to make sure your music is heard on every radio station in the metro.

Kitchie Nadal's self-titled debut quickly spiraled to gold status. The former Mojofly vocalist wowed audiences with her sincere lyrics (it doesn't hurt that she's über pretty, too). <s>andwich was the first in the rock scene to get distributed by EMI, and independent band Twisted Halo signed on a distribution deal with Vicor Records for their first album, "In Loving Memory of the Fearless Exploits of the Bolo Brigade."

SPONGE Cola

Scandals. The Superbowl XXXVIII's halftime performance of Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake left us thinking it was a horrible publicity stunt. Britney tied the knot, got divorced, then tied the knot again. Jennifer Lopez dumped Ben Affleck and got married to Marc Anthony.

Gwen Stefani was outraged to find out that her husband, Gavin Rossdale, has a 16-year-old child, who incidentally was also his goddaughter.

Concerts: The good and the bad. The Black Eyed Peas were greeted with open arms—too bad the organizers refused to give much love to the audience. While the Peas rocked the stage, the show's opening acts spent more time onstage than the main act, and the electricity went out in the middle of the show. Promotion for the concert was so bad that people were calling random radio stations asking where they could get tickets. One record company executive lamented that they should have brought their badminton rackets to the venue to make use of the huge space due to the absence of a crowd.

This year's Fete dela Musique had the promise of the best Fete ever—if only the rains didn't, well, rain on the Fete's parade. Radioactive Sago Project brought down the stage, literally, and venues closed down by 10 p.m.

There weren't many outstanding concerts this year. While there was MyxMo and the PULP Summer Slam, each music fest was just like every other one. The MTV AIDS Music Summit was for a good cause, alright, but their message hardly got into anyone's head.

"Aside from the Black Eyed Peas, every other band, like Linkin Park and Incubus, treated it an ordinary gig," director and graphic designer Avid Liongoren said. "It's always "Manila, you rock! It's 'insert name of city here,' you rock!"

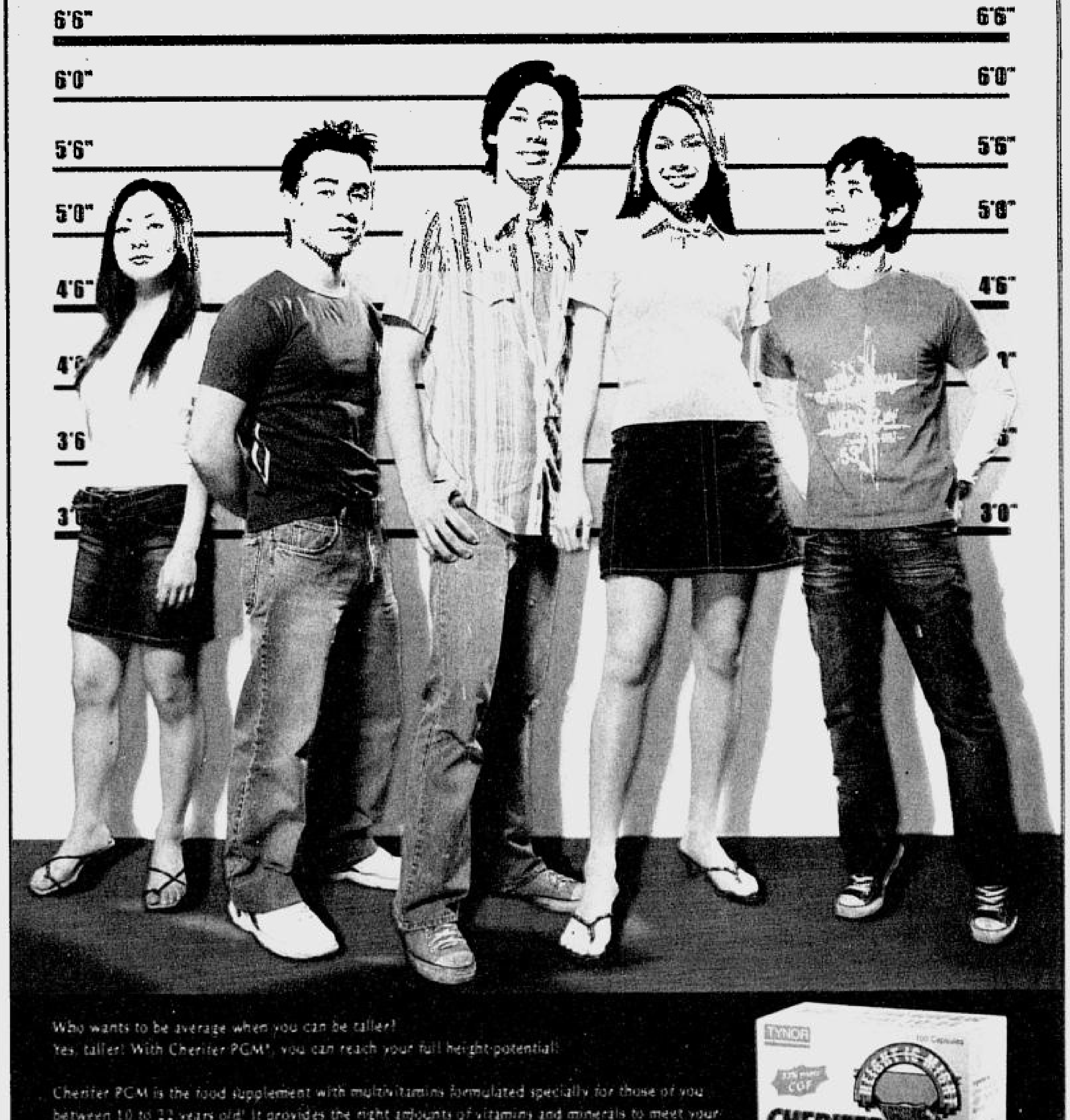
Cancelled tours. Hanson cancelled their tour in the beginning of the year, then Slipknot withdrew because of terrorist attacks.

OPM videos

MTV and MYX finally got OPM videos on rotation. Yay to that! Some of the videos that rock are Kjwan's "Daliri" (Marie Jamora simply rocks), 7 Foot Jr.'s "Kwento", and Radioactive Sago Project's "Astro."

Videos we'd like to forget were ever shot would be Kitchie Nadal's "Huwag na Huwag Mong Sasabihin," Kyla's "Human Nature" and "Not Your Ordinary Girl," and Nina's recent video (the green tarp underneath the sand and the heavy makeup is just tacky, tacky, tacky.)

DO YOU MEASURE UP?



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Cherifer PGM is the food supplement with multivitamins formulated specially for those of you between 10 to 22 years old! It provides the right amounts of vitamins and minerals to meet your RDA (Required Daily Allowance). What's more, it contains Chlorella Growth Factor (CGF), a concentrated natural protein that enables you to reach your maximum height potential. It's no wonder doctors recommend Cherifer PGM for growing teenagers like you.

Want to measure up to your potential? With the proper diet and Cherifer PGM everyday, you can be all and as tall as you can be! Because height matters!

[illegible] Cherifer PGM

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**[illegible] Cherifer PGM is the most prescribed [illegible] supplement with multivitamins for teenagers

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NO APPROVED THERAPEUTIC CLAIMS

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Newsmakers, bluesmakers of 2004

They made us laugh, they made us wonder, they made us proud—these are the personalities that splashed our headlines and deadlines with color

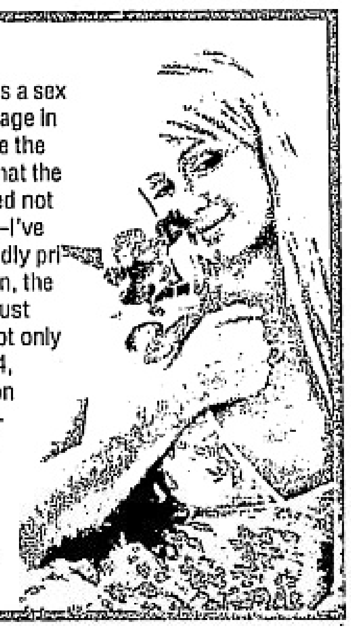
By Pam Pastor

Jasmine Trias

She might have lost in "American Idol" but she's won big in this country. Her visit to Manila had fans and members of the press going crazy. She with the sweet smile, the ubiquitous flower and the armload of endorsements may no longer be in the country, but she's left imprints of her presence with her countless billboards and ads. So what if people say she's overrated? She's singing her way to the bank.

Manny Pacquiao

Earlier this year, his match in Las Vegas ended in a draw and he blamed it on bad socks. Just before the year ended, with a new socks endorsement under his belt, Manny made the whole country proud by knocking out opponent Fahsan 3K Battery with a left uppercut. He will be knocking down more opponents, we're sure of it.



Paris Hilton

I salute anyone who survives a sex scandal. There is great courage in being able to go out and face the world again after knowing that the whole world has downloaded not just one, but two (or three—I've lost count) of your supposedly private porn videos. Then again, the bottomless vat of money must help too. Paris Hilton has not only survived, she shone in 2004, what with the second season of "The Simple Life," the release of her book, "Confessions of an Heiress," and even her new jewelry line. Love her or hate her, this hotel heiress seems determined to stay.

Anna Nicole Smith

The ex-Guess model catapulted herself back into crazy entertainment headlines with her strange antics. She had the whole online world talking about her bizarre behavior at the American Music Awards. Was she high? Was she drunk? Had she gone completely bonkers? We would probably never know.

Ashlee Simpson

While we just glossed over her during her stint on "Seventh Heaven," we took to her admittedly good song, "Pieces of Me." Ashlee Simpson had finally broken out of her sister Jessica's shadow—and she sounded way (as in way) better. But then she had to go and screw it all up on "Saturday Night Live," when a production glitch made it obvious that Ashlee had been lip-synching her songs on the show. They later on blamed it on her supposed acid reflux disease and she proceeded to pick up the pieces. Although some fans pledge loyalty, others are not convinced. In fact, she was booed at the recent Billboard Awards. But Ashlee seems determined to leave the SNL embarrassment behind and move on with her career. We'll see.

Ethel Booba

Her climb to stardom started early. At 14, she was singing in different hotels and was a regular at singing contests. Her knack for making people laugh is undeniably what got her noticed. Now, she's all over television and we believe she deserves every second of it. She's frank, sometimes brutally so. She has no qualms about admitting that her body has been surgically sculpted. She wears dresses so revealing that the MTRCB has been after her. She's quirky, she's crass, she's crazy, she makes us laugh, she seems like a lot of fun. She's funny, period.

Faye B. San Juan

This 12-year-old girl and her mom pulled one of the biggest hoaxes of 2004. After the Jasmine Trias visit, our inboxes were flooded with e-mails about a young Pinay girl who had won several math and physics competitions abroad. The e-mails claimed that our celebrity-centric society had been neglecting the achievements of brilliant young minds like Faye. Several individuals and organizations soon gave her the attention that she deserved. Her story was given media mileage; she was honored and even received a scholarship. But the fairy tale didn't last long. Her story was exposed a hoax. Faye herself let it slip that the whole thing had been a lie. That she and her mother had fabricated everything to get back at her father who left them. She did not win any competition in Australia and Indonesia like the e-mail said. This is material for Snopes.com.

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Super Instant
3-in-1 Coffee Mix
Bagay sa taste mo!
San Miguel Super Coffeemix
San Mig Cafe
Super Instant 3-in-1 Coffee Mix
Mild
NET WT. 14g
Classic
Strong

Sweet and creamy!

Suave!

Full-bodied!

San Miguel Super Coffeemix

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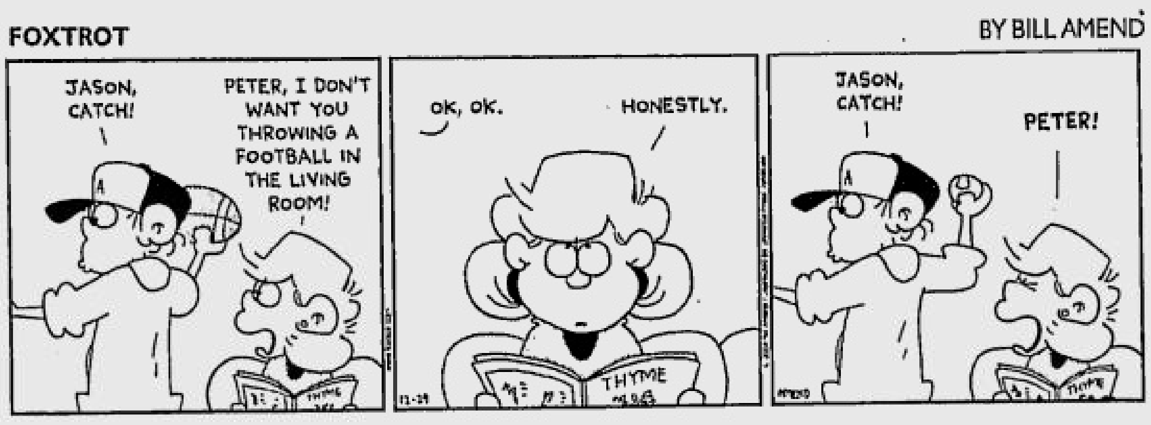
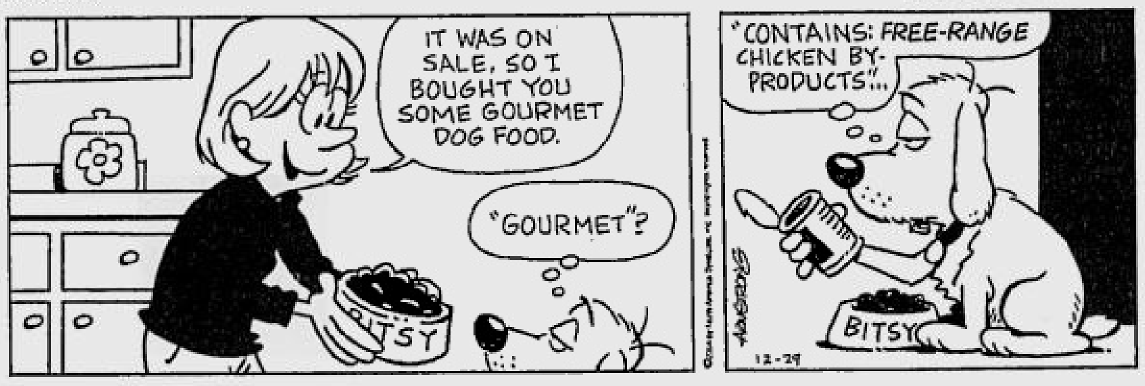
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


JASON, CATCH!
PETER, I DON'T WANT YOU THROWING A FOOTBALL IN THE LIVING ROOM!
OK, OK.
HONESTLY.
JASON, CATCH!
PETER!
THYME

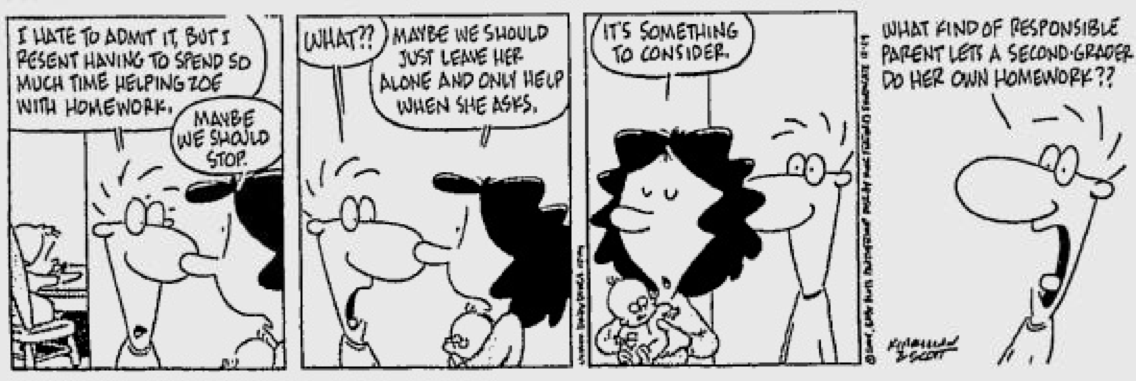
MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


IT WAS ON SALE, SO I BOUGHT YOU SOME GOURMET DOG FOOD.
"GOURMET"?
"CONTAINS: FREE-RANGE CHICKEN BY-PRODUCTS"...
BITSY
12-29

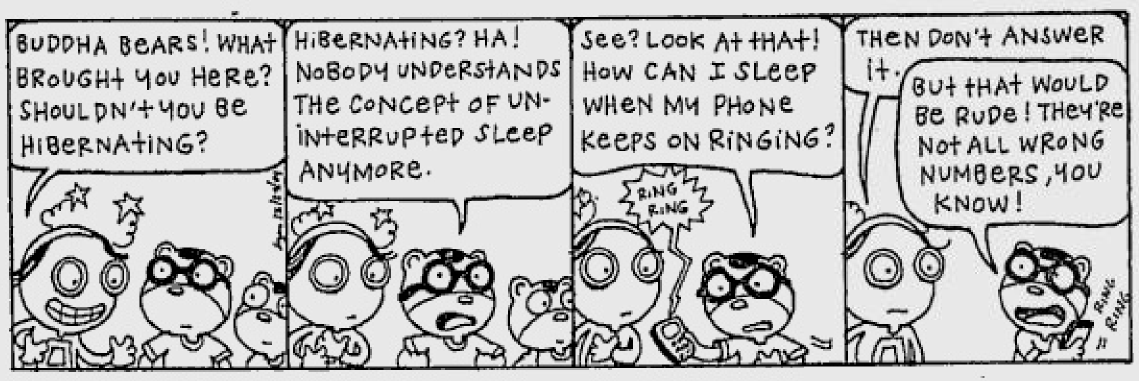
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


I HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT I RESENT HAVING TO SPEND SO MUCH TIME HELPING ZOE WITH HOMEWORK.
MAYBE WE SHOULD STOP.
WHAT??
MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST LEAVE HER ALONE AND ONLY HELP WHEN SHE ASKS.
IT'S SOMETHING TO CONSIDER.
WHAT KIND OF RESPONSIBLE PARENT LETS A SECOND-GRADER DO HER OWN HOMEWORK??

ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


BUDDHA BEARS! WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE? SHOULDN'T YOU BE HIBERNATING?
HIBERNATING? HA! NOBODY UNDERSTANDS THE CONCEPT OF UNINTERRUPTED SLEEP ANYMORE.
SEE? LOOK AT THAT! HOW CAN I SLEEP WHEN MY PHONE KEEPS ON RINGING?
RING RING
THEN DON'T ANSWER IT.
BUT THAT WOULD BE RUDE! THEY'RE NOT ALL WRONG NUMBERS, YOU KNOW!
RING RING

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You are a leader in your group. You might not seek this out, but the respect others show you places you in this role. You have an ironic sense of humor. You are a clever conversationalist. Communication is your forte. You intrigue people. An important choice awaits you this year. Choose wisely.
Birthdate of: Jude Law, actor; Mary Tyler Moore, actress; Marianne Faithfull, singer/songwriter.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Someone might give you a gift today that helps you go back to school or get advanced training. Similarly, you might get a wonderful invitation to travel somewhere.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Gifts and goodies come your way today! This is the day to share something if you have to do it. Expect inheritances, perks, favors and advantages.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Casual relationships could heat up in a very lovely way today. Suddenly, what was flirtatious and racy now looks sweet, tender and committed.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): You can get an enormous amount done at work today, because people are helpful and supportive. Whatever you want will fall in your lap.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): This is a wonderfully romantic day. It's a great day for a date; it's also a great day for a party. Entertaining activities and playful times with children will delight you. (It's good for financial speculation, too!)

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): This is a lovely day to decorate at home or to entertain family members. Whatever you do will be rewarding and pleasant. (Your home is a source of beauty and joy today.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): This is a fantastic day to sign contracts or to arrive at agreements with others. All conversations—especially with siblings and relatives—are upbeat, positive and happy.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): This is a wonderful day to make money! It's excellent for all business transactions. If you go shopping today, you might spend a lot, but you'll love what you get.

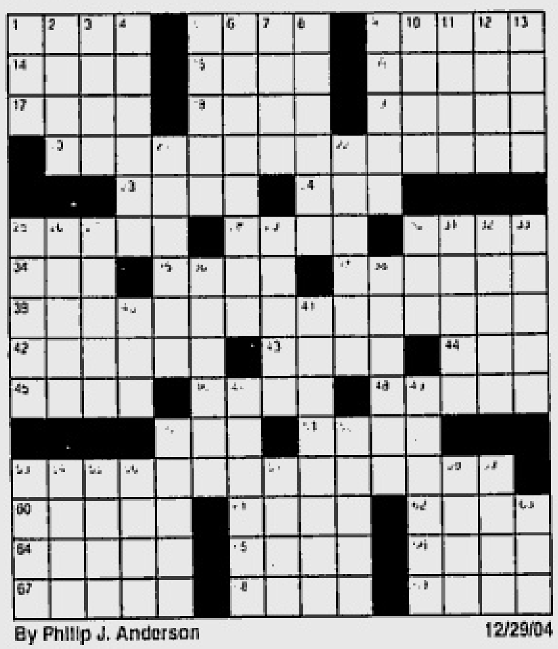
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): You feel big-hearted and loving toward the entire world today. You can't wipe that grin off your face! Something happens that makes you feel happy, confident and hopeful about your future.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Someone unknown to you or working behind the scenes can definitely promote your career today. People are saying good things about you behind your back. (How nice!)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): What a wonderful, successful day schmoozing with others! This is the perfect time to network and join forces with people. You inspire people today.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): You look marvelous in the eyes of others today. If there is anything you want to do and you need permission or approval to do it, today is the day to get it!

DAILY CROSSWORD

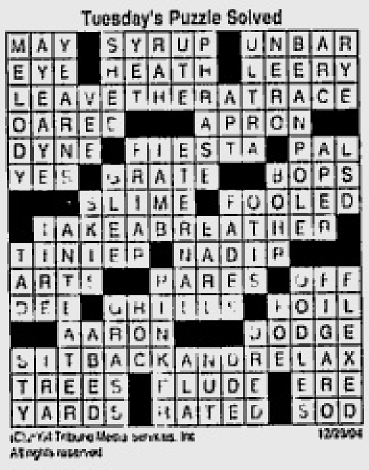


By Philip J. Anderson
Portland, OR
12/29/04

ACROSS
1 Renown
5 Sibilant jeer
9 Ibsen's Gabler
14 Fiery stone
15 Pro's opponent
16 Shun
17 Highest quality
18 Read a bar code
19 Grade starter?
20 Long times in a mall?
23 Quiet relaxation
24 August sign
25 With regard to
28 Robert of "The Sopranos"
30 Unadorned
34 Actor Wheaton
35 Trig ratio
37 Obscured
39 Long times in a school?
42 Upset an incumbent
43 Experiment
44 Vane dir.
45 Cowardly Lion's portrayer
46 Lohengrin's love
48 Pentium manufacturers
50 Sister's sib
51 TLC part
53 Long times in a casino?
60 Notions
61 Make headway
62 Piece of gossip
64 Numbers game
65 "The Time Machine" race
66 Collar type
67 City on the Ruhr
68 Lacoste or Levesque
69 Recent reports

DOWN
1 Pocket-watch accessory
2 Copies
3 Alda TV series
4 La corrida beast
5 Window catches
6 Stirring to action
7 Getz or Musial
8 Unmarried
9 Groucho's brother
10 Don't __ do that again!
11 Overdo the mothering
12 Nearly hopeless
13 Hubbubs
21 Iran, once
22 Waits on
25 Profoundly disturbing
26 City in Tuscany
27 Meat
29 Lane-crossing turns
30 Movie industry, casually
31 Elite invitees
32 "Harlem Nights" co-star
33 Ford failure
36 Practical trainee
38 Whole
40 German article
41 Response
47 Lumberjack
49 Make orderly
50 American buffalo
52 Putter Palmer
53 Disarming charm
54 Wedding vows
55 Seines
56 Odomes of the NFL
57 Merchant's goal
58 Model Moss
59 Reduce speed
63 Rank in the nav.

Tuesday's Puzzle Solved



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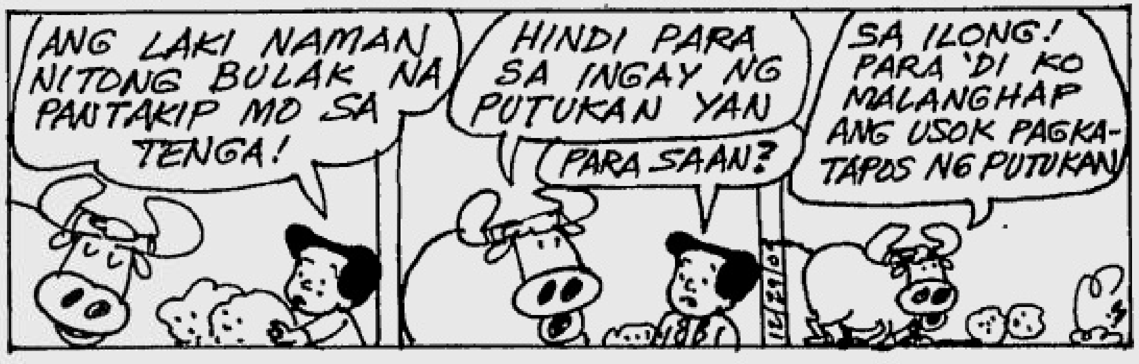
12/28/04

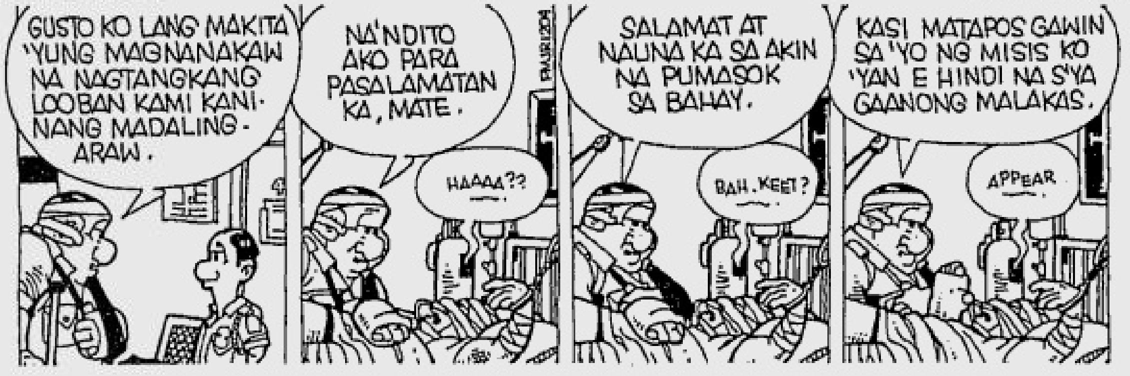
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


ANG LAKI NAMAN NITONG BULAK NA PANTAKIP MO SA TENGA!
HINDI PARA SA INGAY NG PUTUKAN YAN
PARA SAAN?
SA ILONG! PARA 'DI KO MALANGHAP ANG USOK PAGKATAPOS NG PUTUKAN

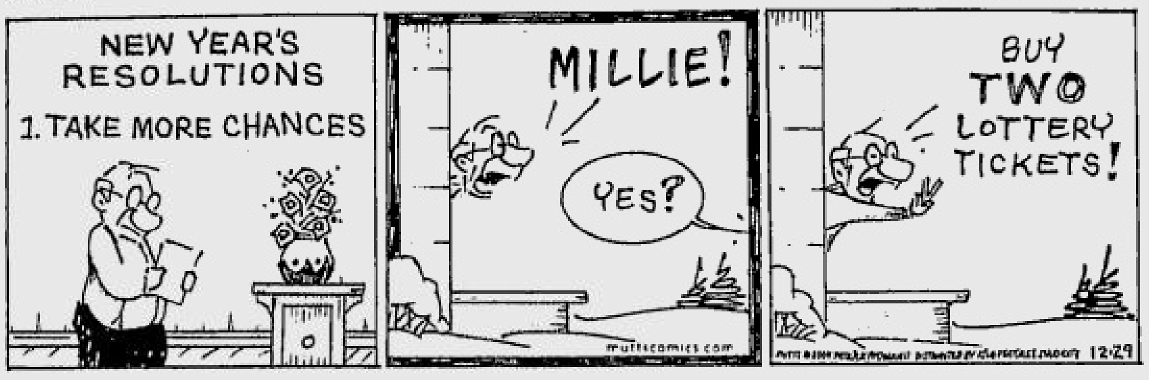
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


GUSTO KO LANG MAKITA 'YUNG MAGNANAKAW NA NAGTANGKANG LOOBAN KAMI KANINANG MADALING-ARAW.
NA'NDITO AKO PARA PASALAMATAN KA, MATE.
HAAAA??
SALAMAT AT NAUNA KA SA AKIN NA PUMASOK SA BAHAY.
BAH..KEET?
KASI MATAPOS GAWIN SA 'YO NG MISIS KO 'YAN E HINDI NA S'YA GAANONG MALAKAS.
APPEAR

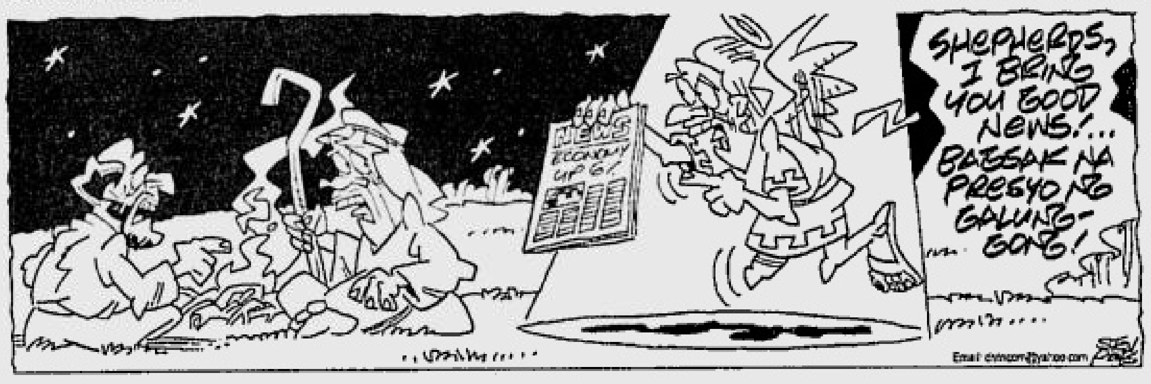
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS
1. TAKE MORE CHANCES
MILLIE!
YES?
BUY TWO LOTTERY TICKETS!
muttscomics.com
12-29

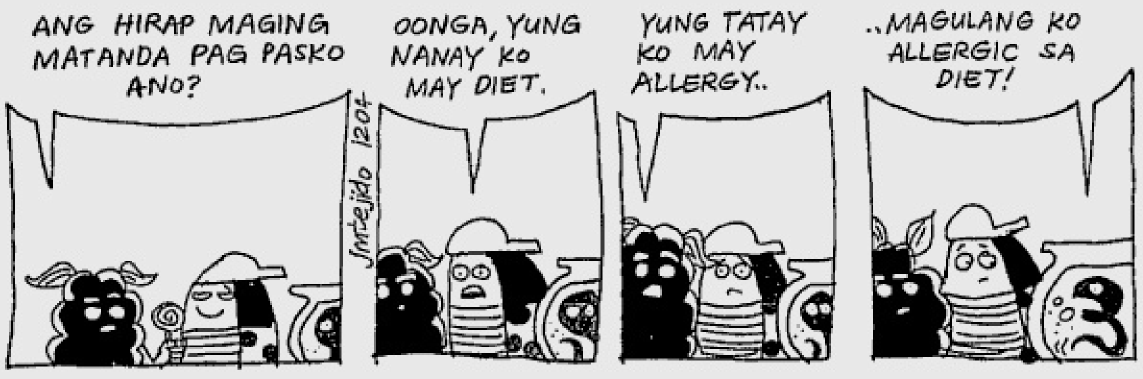
DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


NEWS
ECONOMY UP 6%
SHEPHERDS, I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS!... BAGSAK NA PRESYO NG GALUNGGONG!

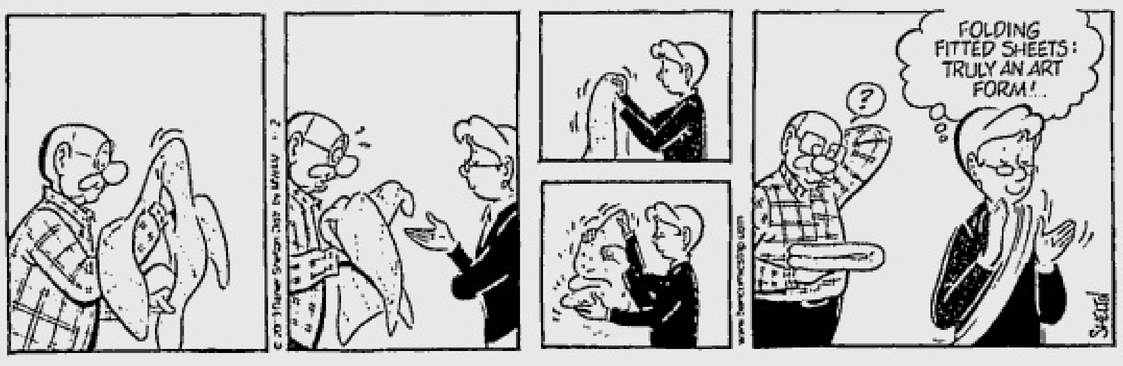
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


ANG HIRAP MAGING MATANDA PAG PASKO ANO?
OONGA, YUNG NANAY KO MAY DIET.
YUNG TATAY KO MAY ALLERGY..
..MAGULANG KO ALLERGIC SA DIET!

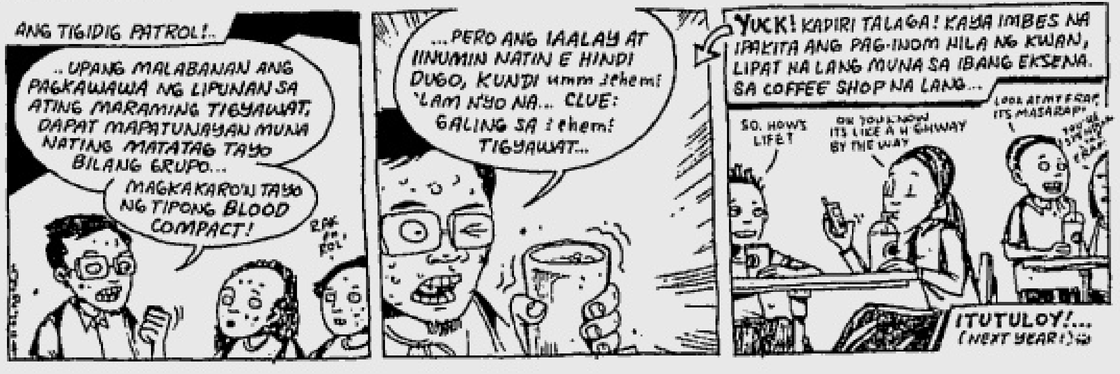
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


?
FOLDING FITTED SHEETS: TRULY AN ART FORM!..

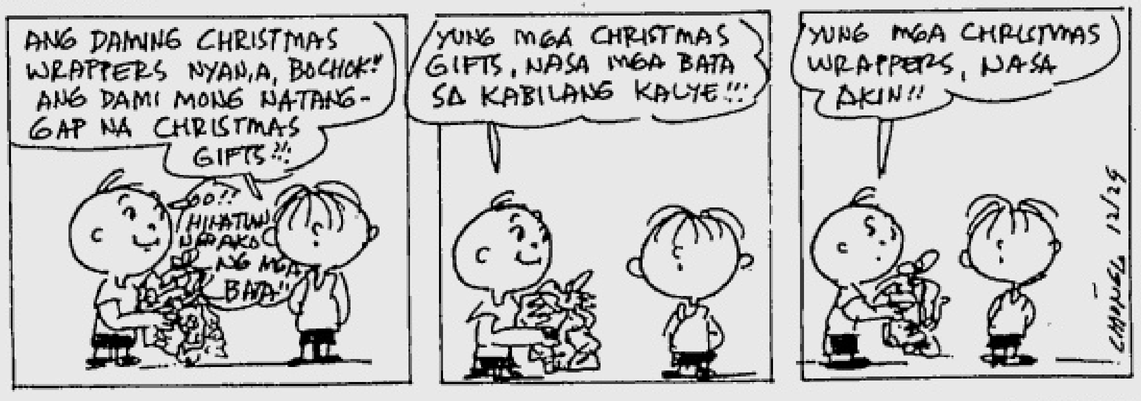
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


ANG TIGIDIG PATROL!..
..UPANG MALABANAN ANG PAGKAWAWA NG LIPUNAN SA ATING MARAMING TIGYAWAT, DAPAT MAPATUNAYAN MUNA NATING MATATAG TAYO BILANG GRUPO...
MAGKAKARO'N TAYO NG TIPONG BLOOD COMPACT!
RAK EN ROL
...PERO ANG IAALAY AT IINUMIN NATIN E HINDI DUGO, KUNDI umm ahem! 'LAM N'YO NA... CLUE: GALING SA ahem! TIGYAWAT...
YUCK! KADIRI TALAGA! KAYA IMBES NA IPAKITA ANG PAG-INOM NILA NG KWAN, LIPAT NA LANG MUNA SA IBANG EKSENA. SA COFFEE SHOP NA LANG...
SO, HOW'S LIFE?
OH YOU KNOW ITS LIKE A HIGHWAY BY THE WAY
LOOK AT MY FRAP, ITS MASARAP!
ITUTULOY!... (NEXT YEAR!)

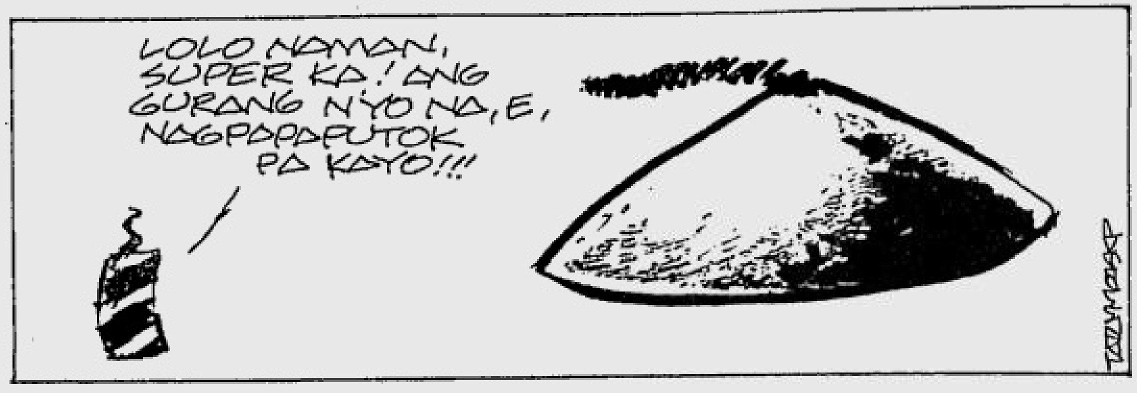
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


ANG DAMING CHRISTMAS WRAPPERS NYAN, A, BOCHOK! ANG DAMI MONG NATANGGAP NA CHRISTMAS GIFTS?!
OO!! HINATID KO NG MGA BATA!!
YUNG MGA CHRISTMAS GIFTS, NASA MGA BATA SA KABILANG KALYE!!!
YUNG MGA CHRISTMAS WRAPPERS, NASA AKIN!!
12/29

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING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SPORTING YEAR 2004

Hits and misses

By Dennis U. Eroa
Inquirer Libre sports editor

JENNIFER Rosales, she with the exotic looks that can sweep men off their feet and a swing that can elicit ohhs and ahhs from the gallery, made us all proud. Manny Pacquiao dropped his occasional spoiled brat-mentality long enough to soothe the downtrodden's spirits with his blazing fists.

J-Ro, a fashionista, and Pacman, a brawler, were undoubtedly the year's best Pinoy athletes.

Ahead of Pacquiao's Las Vegas clash with Mexican Juan Manuel Marquez, Rosales put the country on the map of international sports, winning by one stroke the Chick-Fil-A Charity Championship in Stockbridge, Georgia.

In winning her maiden Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Tour event, Rosales fattened her bank account by $240,000 (about P13.4 million).

Rising star

She kept her magnificent climb, even leading in the United States Open in July by three shots with one round to go.

The Filipina wonder eventually finished fourth behind eventual winner, American Meg Mallon, in South Hadley, Massachusetts but her reputation as a rising international star in golf has been affirmed.

The merry month of May looked complete when the confident Pacquiao traded punches with the 30-year-old Barerra for the International Boxing Federation and and World Boxing Association featherweight titles at a sold-out match at the MGM Grand Hotel.

Clearly, the superman from General Santos landed the more decisive punches to the delight of 10,000 fans, including Filipino immigrants who waved the country's tri-colors.

The power in Pacquiao's fists decked the Mexican hero thrice on the first round. But when the verdict after the 12-round slugfest was announced, the crowd was stunned.

It was a draw. And Pacquiao became a king without an empire.

Tarnished reputation

His reputation tarnished by his nocturnal habits and his conflict with his handlers, Pacquiao still ended 2004 with a bang against a Thai patsy named 3K Battery.

In a clash dubbed as *Yanig sa* Taguig, Pacquiao demolished Battery in the fourth round at the Fort. Naturally, blood-hungry fans jubilated at the sight of Pacquiao's foe lying flat on the canvas.

But the fact remains: Pacquiao will not become the next Gabriel "Flash" Elorde without a legitimate world crown.

This means the local hero, known for his generosity to the poor, must beat Marquez or repeat against Marco Antonio Barrera, Erik Morales' conqueror, to start his reign.

J-Ro and Pacquiao's respective journeys highlighted a year also spiced up by De la Salle University's and Philippine Christian University's triumphs in the University Athletic Association of the Philippines and National College Athletic Association cage wars; Dottie Ardina and Miguel Tabuena's victories in the US Kids World Championship in Williamsburg, Virginia; Henry Dagmil's historic long jump in the National Open Track and Field Invitational at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum; and Alex Pagulayan's World Pool triumph.

Unsportsmanlike

Bickering among various sports agencies, however, continues. Selfishness among sports leaders translates into lack of preparation for the country's so-called elite athletes.

As the likes of Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia hit giant sporting strides, the country sinks deeper into oblivion.

The BAP had its regular set of critics but bounced back when it signed a historic memorandum of agreement with the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) regarding the sending of a national team to the Asian Basketball Conference.

Barangay Ginebra dumped coach Allan Caidic and Siot Tanquincen promptly rescued the Kings who beat the Red Bull in the PBA Fiesta Conference finals in July.

Jittery start

Viva Mineral Water-FEU (Far Eastern University) and Hapee Toothpaste won a Philippine Basketball League title each as the league recovered from early jitters following Chino Trinidad's announcement that he was quitting. He didn't and it was back to normal in the league, known as breeding ground of future basketball heroes.

Local tennis received a boost from the successful Subic Bay International Tennis Center Tennis Academy, amateur boxing continued to struggle, swimming sank but badminton reached every nook and cranny of the Philippines. Football hasn't regained lost glory.

JENNIFER Rosales hugs the trophy after her first LPGA win at the Chick-Fil-A Charity Championship in Stockbridge, Georgia on May 2, 2004.

August was forgettable as the country's premier athletes failed to bring home a medal from the Athens Olympics.

Taekwondo jins Mary Antoinette Rivero and Donald Geisler fought gallantly and archer Jasmin Figueroa showed great promise. But the boxers, tipped as probable medalists, flopped against superior opposition. Romeo Brin, Chris Camat, Harry Tañamor and Violito Payla flunked the tests.

It's back to the drawing boards for Pinoy sports leaders.

The Philippine Sports Commission under Eric Buhain got hit by allegations of corruption. Peping Cojuangco replaced Cito Dayrit as chief of the Philippine Olympic Committee and the country races against time and tries to overcome money issues as it prepares to host the 2005 Southeast Asian Games.

A bomb was dropped in November when PBA poster boy Alvin Patrimonio announced his retirement after 16 colorful years.

Nicknamed the Captain, Patrimonio was feted in short but meaningful ceremonies Dec. 22 at the Araneta Coliseum. It was the day the multitude accompanied actor Fernando Poe, Jr. to his final resting place. Patrimonio's no. 16 jersey was retired. He tied Ramon Fernandez's record of four Most Valuable Player awards. He also won six championships.

Fil-shams' exit

A month earlier, this basketball-crazy nation was rocked with the Department of Justice's decision to deport so-called Fil-sham (allegedly non-Filipino) players, headed by man-mountain Asi Taulava.

The PBA worried about rating but the public, fed up with falsehoods and inequalities, generally supported the decision.

In the Battle of the Courts, Platinum badminton Interclub also produced a winner in The Zone, which beat Premier City.

Despite wonderful publicity, the Manila Marathon, for the second straight year, was chaotic and badly managed.

In a situation reminiscent of the Athens Olympics Marathon, eventual winner Allan Ballester had to hurdle an over-eager competitor to breast the tape first in "bruising" fashion.

The country got battered by man-made and natural disasters and December saw the RP Blu Girls finish a fighting 5th in the Asian Softball Championship. Japan over over Taipei.

Talk N' Text, Bgy. Ginebra and Shell appear to have the edge in the ongoing PBA Philippine Cup, which will treat the fans to a game on Christmas day.

Franz Pumaren confirmed he's going to be back as the La Salle Archers coach in next year's UAAP championships. This, of course, spells trouble for the Eagles and the rest of the pretenders.

The top tech newsmakers of 2004

By the editors of Speed Magazine

SpaceShipOne

The first manned private spaceflight happened last June when SpaceShipOne, flew to the edge of space and back. Not to sit on its laurels, SpaceShipOne made history again in October and triumphed in the international Ansari X Prize race to launch the first privately built spacecraft. Says X Prize founder Peter Diamandis, "It's a spaceship that fits in your two-car garage, and you can take it to space every other day."

Portable media players

If you have a portable media player like Creative's Zen Portable Media Center, Samsung's Yepp YH-999 or Sony's HMP-A1, you can enjoy all your digital entertainment with one device, anytime, anywhere. Now you can watch movies, listen to music and view digital outputs whenever you feel like it.

Space explorations

Need a breath of fresh air? In the next couple of centuries or so, living on Mars, or Saturn even, might already be an option. The Mars Exploration Rover Mission (with twin rovers Spirit and Opportunity) that was launched into space in June 2003 successfully landed on the Red Planet in January this year. The Cassini spacecraft and Huygens probe, meanwhile, reached the ringed planet on June 30 after almost seven years of interplanetary cruise.

MMORPGs

It all started with Ragnarok. Now, the name of the game is playing an MMORPG (that's Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game), a spin-off of console Roleplaying Games wherein parties upon parties of people go around an ever-expanding world interacting with thousands of other users worldwide. Available in flavors of the fantasmic (World of Warcraft) to the cartoony (Ragnarok) and the Old World (Khan), there's enough to satisfy everyone.

Silver Nano and Bio-silver technologies

You wear silver as an accessory, like a bracelet or a ring. But have you heard of silver that washes what you wear? Silver Nano (Samsung) and Bio-silver (LG) technology is one of the applications of nanotechnology being used today by electronics manufacturers. Silver Nano and Bio-silver technologies provide breakthrough benefits such as antibacterial and deodorization features in electrical appliances like air conditioners, refrigerators, and washing machines.

New-generation smartphones

They're smarter than ever. This year saw the launch of a new generation of smartphones that boast of better interface, OS, and multimedia features. There are smartphones from practically every company. Sony Ericsson, Nokia, Siemens, Motorola, BlackBerry and O2. They're the lifeline of the ultimate mobile warrior.

Wider Wi-Fi deployment

True, a good portion of the hotspots remain confined at coffee shops, but consider the fact that airport lounges, cybercafés, family restaurants, schools, malls, even beach resorts (!) are becoming wireless-capable. Someday we'll run out of excuses not to keep in touch.

1MP+ camera phones

When countries like Japan already enjoy camera phones with five megapixels, it seems like others (the Philippines, specially) are taking their merry little time in unveiling truly convergent products. Enter the 1MP+ lineup. True, this still would not replace your trusty digital camera anytime soon, but during moments when access to one isn't possible, at least the same mobile phone you use to take calls and send messages can take more-than-mediocre images.

Motorola C380/C651/E398/V3/MPx

From the entry-level Motorola C380 to the C651 camphone to the feature-rich E398 to the razor-thin V3 clamshell, you've got a range of stylish and high-quality mobile phones guaranteed to meet just about every conceivable consumer need or want. Moto comeback!

Honda Jazz

The long-awaited hatchback version of the City, the Jazz, debuted this year with hot-hatch styling, a peppy yet frugal 1.3-liter twin-spark plug i-DSI engine, and that lovely CVT autobox with steering wheel-mounted shifters.

Siemens 65-series handsets

Siemens' 65-series handsets have not just been setting new trends in design and features (like largest-in-class LCD screens), they are also proving to be a revelation in terms of user-friendliness, especially compared to previous Siemens models. There's the user-friendly C65 and CX65, the sporty M65, the megapixel camera phone S65 and the delectable SL65 sliding phone.

Martin Gonzalvez

Another Filipino is making it big in the international scene; no, not as an American Idol contestant, but as a Mac Genius. Martin Gonzalvez, a long-time Macintosh user and founder of the PinoyMac.org community, was hired by Apple computers to be one of the few Filipino Mac Geniuses.

Nokia N-Gage QD

The N-Gage QD, the highly improved version of last year's groundbreaking N-Gage gaming phone, is nothing less than an amalgamation of a smartphone (the QD runs on the Series 60 version of the Symbian 6.0 platform and has lots of business applications) and a Game Boy Advance SP (albeit with a smaller screen but with lots of wireless gaming apps).

Netopia in Thailand

Netopia Internet Café, which already has over a hundred branches in the country, opened its first branch in Bangkok last August and has expanded its Thailand branch network to three branches as we speak. Bravo to Filipino entrepreneurship!

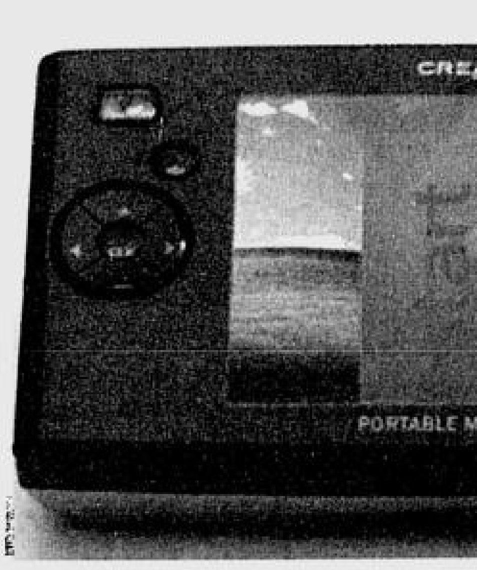
Big-spaced free e-mail

Since everyone started talking about the much coveted GMail account (up to this writing, getting an account requires an invitation from a current user) and the whopping gigabyte of space that it offers, other big guns in the free email business started re-evaluating (and spontaneously increasing) the amount of email space they freely provide users.

Apple iPod Mini/4th-gen iPod/iPod Photo/iMac G5

2004 is definitely Apple's year with its relentless issues of drool-worthy products: the 4th gen-iPod, the iPod Mini which comes in four fructose-inducing hues, and the iPod Photo. And then there's the iMac G5. Everyone kept wondering where the computer was, for it only had a 2-inch-thick monitor. Turns out, everything is already in there.

NOKIA N-Gage QD



CREATIVE'S Zen Portable Media Center

Mobile phone cash services

Mobile telecom giants Smart and Globe both launched their respective cash services this year: Smart's Cash Padala lets subscribers send cash to a recipient via SMS. Globe's G-Cash, meanwhile, allows subscribers to pay for purchases using their mobile phones, essentially making one's SIM a mobile wallet.

Camera phones below P7,000

You never know when you have to take a quick snapshot. Unfortunately, we seldom have a camera with us during these moments. But we do have our cell phones! Why not put a camera in these little buggers, right? Well, the phone companies have been doing exactly that for over two years now but costs have been quite prohibitive. Not anymore! 2004 has to be the year when just about every minimum-wage earner—well, almost every minimum-wage earner—can actually afford to place one of these nifty devices in his or her pocket.

Sony Ericsson P900/P910i/K700i/K500i/S700i

This mobile phone company is on a roll. The tremendously full-featured P-series smartphones have redefined mobile data and communications for the 21st century executive. The K700i and K500i handsets won many converts by their stunning blend of design elegance, user-friendliness and heavy-hitting features and applications. And the new S700i breaks new ground with its 1.3-megapixel camera and its radical swivel-style design, hidden keypad and its PDA-like large screen.

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'No bad blood between Rivermaya and Bamboo'

By Marinel R. Cruz

SHOW TIME

RIVERMAYA A.B. (after Bamboo). "We don't know how we're going to sound next"

THERE'S no bad blood between him and Rivermaya. He quit because he said he did not want to be part of the band scene anymore. When he came back [from the United States], he started jamming with other bands. We can only guess what happened next."

Rivermaya frontman Rico Blanco was talking about the band's former lead singer, Bamboo Mañalac, who decided to leave the group in 1998 and live in the US.

Bamboo, who played with Rivermaya for five years, is now with a four-member band that carries his name.

"He decided to move on," Rico said of his former bandmate. "We're good. We send text messages to each other."

BAMBOO Mañalac

Reporters who attended Rivermaya's press conference last week were told not to ask questions about the members' "personal lives" and their relationships with "other bands."

But the organizers of the press lunch were not able to keep reporters from asking why the band is now "incomplete."

Special edition

The original lineup featured Bamboo as lead singer, Rico on keyboards, Perf de Castro on guitar, Nathan Azarcon on bass and Mark Escueta on drums.

Perf subsequently formed his own group, Triaxis, and Nathan is now with Bamboo.

"Rivermaya is still here because of the people who continue to believe in us," said Rico. "We've hurdled many obstacles and survived them all."

Playing for Rivermaya with Rico and drummer Mark are its new bassist, Japs Sergio and guitarist Mike Elgar.

The band members said they would rather focus on promoting their newest record, "Between the Stars & Waves" than talk about changes within the band.

A special edition of the album, which contains the song "Liwanag sa Dilim," was released in time for Christmas. "Between the Stars & Waves" is produced by Viva Records.

According to Rico, who wrote "Liwanag sa Dilim," the song is about hope and courage, of setting a good example so that others may follow.

Snapshots

"This is the new version of our song 'Awit ng Kabataan,' which is already 10 years old," Rico explained. "We felt we needed to update it."

"We were supposed to promote the album up to next year," added Mark. "But last November, we wrote and recorded 'Liwanag' for a TV commercial. *Sayang naman* if we don't include it in the album."

The special edition contains the acoustic and full-band versions of "Liwanag sa Dilim." Lyrics, guitar chords and bass tablatures can also be found in their website www.rivermaya.net.

"I look at our songs as snapshots," said Rico. "They reflect the kind of music we listen to, as well as our knowledge about music at the time they were made. We don't know how we're going to sound next."

"Even recorded tunes sound different when we sing them live," said Mike. "It's as if our songs have lives of their own."

First time

Mike said his older brother influenced him to join bands.

"I was a member of several bands even in high school," he said. "Eventually, I met the guys of Rivermaya and the rest is history."

Japs said he grew up in an environment where music was accessible.

"Most of my childhood friends were part of a music group," he recalled. "I used to be a drummer until Rico and the others encouraged me to try playing bass. This is actually the first time that I'm doing that."

"I was a keyboardist before I started playing the drums for Rivermaya," said Mark. "I wasn't sure then if I'd be an effective drummer. It's interesting how I ended up doing more than I originally planned."

A thought from a non-reader.
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Mikel learns to rock

LAST year, he made a big splash as Richard Gomez's rebellious son in the family drama "Filipinas" and in the top-grossing fantasy flick "Captain Barbell."

This year, Mikel Campos returns to the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF), as Mark Bautista's best friend in "Lastikman," Viva Films' entry in the year-end derby.

The role in "Lastikman" caps what has been a very busy year for Mikel, who also made his television debut in "Sarah, the Teen Princess."

Next year, Mikel is looking forward to stretching himself even more as a performer by going into something he's always loved: music. He plans to put up a rock band to be called Rock Man, a name taken from an old video game. Joining him in the rock band will be his cousins, who have been playing the guitar since they were young. .

Mikel, who means to take voice lessons with veteran theater actor and singer Cocoy Laurel, will be doing the vocals. Now that "Sarah, the Teen Princess" has ended, and while waiting for his next movie or TV assignment, Mikel has all the time to devote to the band and his music.

MIKEL CAMPOS. School before anything else

He also plans to hit the gym and build up his body for future roles. "I want to have a body like Bruce Lee's," jokes Mikel, a graduating student at the Filipino Child Montessori Research Center in Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

Before anything else, Mikel wants to make sure that he finishes his studies. It's a promise he made to his father Bunny and his mother, commercial model Susan Campos.

His hectic schedule this year caused him to be absent from school several times. "Sometimes I wouldn't be in class for a whole month because of tapings and shootings," he says. "But my teachers gave me assignments, and I had to work twice as hard to finish everything. So now that the TV show is over and the movie is finished, I get to go to school more. I've really been trying to make up, especially for my parents."

It was difficult balancing school work with his show biz commitments, but Mikel says he has no regrets. He particularly enjoyed filming "Lastikman," where he was reunited with Mark and Sarah.

At times, Mikel would tease Mark about his Visayan accent (Mark is from Cagayan de Oro), but it was all in fun. "Trip *lang*," smiles Mikel. Mark didn't mind, and it made the atmosphere on the set light.

Mikel says he's not envious that Mark has already been given a lead role in a movie, while Mikel himself is still waiting for his big break.

"How can I be envious, when he deserves it?" says Mikel. "I know my time will come, and I just want to make sure that I'm ready when it does."

Vehnee Saturno prodigy joins the biz

MARK Kevin, a 16-year-old freshman from De La Salle University, recently performed with hitmakers Rico J. Puno, Rey Valera, Nonoy Zuñiga, Marco Sison and Hajji Alejandro, as well as another special guest, Tosca Puno, in a show called "GH5 Once More" at the Metro Concert Bar on West Avenue, Quezon City.

While the current trend is to raise pop stars from amateur singing contests, Mark Kevin enters the music scene armed with a soon-to-be launched solo album of original compositions by one of the country's top music makers, Vehnee Saturno, who also acts as his trainor.

The husky-voiced BS Biology student is also a member of Inner Soul, a performing organization at De La Salle, and was consistently involved in musical activities during his high school days at Ateneo de Davao University. He loves pop, slow rock and alternative music and goes for Freestyle and South Border but considers his beautiful mom his biggest influence in singing.

"GH5 Once More" had sell-out shows in key cities in the US and Canada. It was produced by RJP Foundation and NJ Associates to help the feeding program of RJP Foundation.

SHOW TIME

MARK KEVIN. Soon an album

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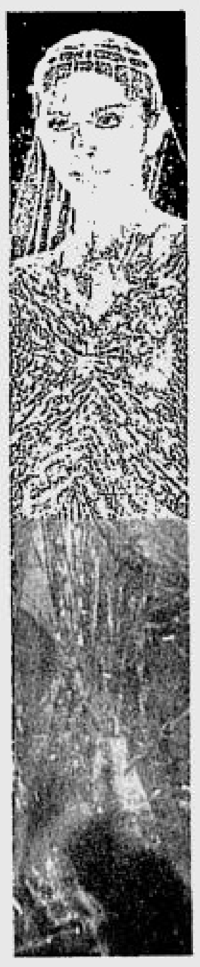
SMART'S 'IT GIRL' Pops Fernandez staged her yearly major concert as a tribute to the international divas of pop. Presented by Smart Communications Inc., "It Girl," directed by Floy Quintos, was held at the Ultra on Dec. 11. The explosive night featured high-energy songs and production numbers as well as surprise guest Martin Nievera. Pops easily proved why she is the "It Girl" in a night of musical spectacle.

Oh, my God, is that Katharine Hepburn?

SHOW STOPPER

NEW YORK—Cate Blanchett comes on strong when she first appears as Katharine Hepburn in Martin Scorsese's new Howard Hughes biopic, "The Aviator." She's talking a mile-a-minute in that Hepburn accent.

Blanchett says Scorsese wanted it that way.

"He wanted Hepburn to come into the film with a bang," Blanchett told AP Radio in an interview. "And so the scene is constructed with her talking her head off. It's quite an assault on the senses."

Blanchett says Scorsese wanted the audience to ask themselves: "Oh, my God. Is that her? Is that Katharine Hepburn?"

"The Aviator" has received six Golden Globe nominations, including best supporting actress for Blanchett. *AP*

POWER PLANT CINEMA

Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41 DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

MANO PO 3 GP 12:40,3:00,5:20,7:40,10:00	ENTENG KABISOTE GP 12:30,3:00,5:30,8:00,10:30	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS PG13 12:45,2:55,5:05,7:15,9:30
LASTIKMAN R13 12:50,3:10,5:30,7:50,10:10	AISHITE IMASU 1941 PG13 1:20,3:35,5:50,8:05,10:20	SIGAW PG13 12:50,3:10,5:30,7:50,10:10

MATINEE SCREENINGS BEFORE 5:00 P.M. - P80.00 - MON. - FRI.

star group of cinemas movie guide

IN DOLBY DIGITAL SOUND

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3 Lastikman
4 Sigaw
5 Panaghoy sa Suba

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1 Enteng Kabisote
2 Spirit of the Glass
3 Panaghoy sa Suba
4 Happy Together
5 Lastikman
6 Sigaw

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1 Sigaw
2 Aishite Masu

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EASTWOOD CINEMAS

1	PANAGHOY SA SUBA 12:25, 3:10, 5:50 8:30, 11:10 PG 13
2	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 12:25, 2:55, 5:20 7:45, 10:10 PG 13
3	ENTENG KABISOTE 12:30, 3:10, 5:50 8:30, 11:10 GP
4	SIGAW 12:45, 3:15, 5:45 8:15, 10:45 PG 13

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CINEMA 1 — **MANO PO 3** 10:30, 12:50, 3:10, 5:30, 7:50, 10:10 **GP**

CINEMA 2 — **LASTIKMAN** 11:50, 2:25, 5:00, 7:35, 10:10 **GP**

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SHANG CINEPLEX

① MANO PO 3
FS 12:20PM, 2:45PM, 5:10PM, 7:35PM
LMF 10PM (GP)

② ENTENG KABISOTE
(GP)

③ AISHITE IMASU 1941
FS 12:40PM, 3:00PM, 5:20PM, 7:40PM, LMF 10PM (PG-13)

④ SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
FS 11:40AM, 2PM, 4:20PM, 6:40PM, LMF 9PM

2004 MetroManila Filmfest
in Cinemas 1 to 4
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In celebration of the Filipino Filmmaker's Creativity

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Araneta Center LEISURE GUIDE

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1	SIGAW 12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
2	AISHITE IMASU 12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
3	PANAGHOY SA SUBA 11:35 2:00 4:25 6:50 9:15
4	LASTIKMAN 10:50 1:10 3:30 5:50 8:10
5	SO HAPPY TOGETHER 12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
6	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
7	MANO PO 3 12:30 2:45 5:00 7:15 9:30
8	ENTENG KABISOTE 11:35 2:00 4:25 6:50 9:15
9	LASTIKMAN 11:55 2:15 4:35 6:55 9:15
10	Opens Soon!

ALI MALL CINEMAS

3	Dolby	SIGAW 11:30 1:40 3:50 6:00 8:10
4	SDDS	PANAGHOY SA SUBA 10:20 12:45 3:10 5:35 8:00
5	dts	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 11:30 1:40 3:50 6:00 8:10
6	Dolby	ENTENG KABISOTE 10:20 12:45 3:10 5:35 8:00
7	Dolby	MANO PO 3 11:05 1:20 3:35 5:50 8:05

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EASTERN	
MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	SEX BOMB / RAMPADORA
ODEON	X-MEN 2
ODEON-2	BUKID AY BASA / KASIBULAN
ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY : LEGEND OF CROCODILE

QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	SALAT SA LIGAYA
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR

NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	AISHITE MASU (1941)
B	CLOSED
C	

MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA 1,2,3&4	NATIONAL TREASURE / BRIDGET JONES / SPIDERMAN 2 / SHREK 2
PREMIERE THEATRE	THE INCREDIBLES

CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	KALABIT
CINEMA-2	SALAT
CINEMA-3	ONE MISSED CALL
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	POLAR EXPRESS
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-6	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-7	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-8	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	HAROLD & KUMAR
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	ALEXANDER
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	BAD SANTA
CINEMA-12	NATIONAL TREASURE
CINEMA-14	HONEY
CINEMA-15	B CUZ OF U

LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT

NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PIÑAS)	NATIONAL TREASURE
CINEMA-1	PASIYAM
CINEMA-2	BRIDGET JONES
CINEMA-4	POLAR EXPRESS

UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARAÑAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK II
CINEMA-4	SELDA

ROBINSONS MOVIEWORLD CINEMAS MOVIE GUIDE

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• METRO MANILA CINEMAS •

GALLERIA	632-9115/16
1 ENTENG KABISOTE • THX	6 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	7 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
3 LASTIKMAN	8 MANO PO 3
4 SIGAW	9 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
5 AISHITE IMASU	10 MANO PO 3

ERMITA	536-7809 to 12
1 ENTENG KABISOTE	
2 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER	5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
3 AISHITE IMASU	6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 LASTIKMAN	7 MANO PO 3

METRO EAST	682-8193/99 • 682-8280
1 MANO PO 3	5 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
2 ENTENG KABISOTE	6 LASTIKMAN
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	7 AISHITE IMASU
4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA	8 SIGAW

NOVALICHES	935-3229/31
1 SIGAW	5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
2 AISHITE IMASU	6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
3 LASTIKMAN	7 ENTENG KABISOTE
4 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER	8 MANO PO 3

30th Metro Manila Film Festival

What's Happening

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2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	4 LASTIKMAN

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UpClose and Personal
with the cast of
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at Robinsons Movieworld GALLERIA
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DEC. 28 (Tuesday)

DEC. 27 (Monday)

Music tames arranger's savage cancer

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

MUSIC soothes the savage breast, 'tis said. It can also keep killer cancer cells at bay.

This is how arranger, composer and keyboard player Toti Fuentes explains why he is still alive a year after he was diagnosed with a rare form of stomach cancer that affects only four in a million cancer patients.

"When I am performing on stage, I'm painless," Toti tells INQUIRER Entertainment.

Unlike many others in the music industry, Fuentes neither smoked nor drank. He only went out nights when he had to perform, and usually went home straight from his gig. Thus, he thought he did not have any reason to worry last year when his weight dropped fast from 270 pounds to 220 pounds in just a few months.

His weight kept on dropping and he felt worse by the day. Subsequent tests by nine doctors showed the worst. He had a gastro-intestinal tumor that was eating away at his stomach. The doctors said he only had three months to live.

New therapy

In November 2003, he bid his friends farewell in a concert and left for Chicago, where he was again checked by another army of doctors. The verdict was the same. He only had three to six months to live. He was sent home after five days to be with his family.

But the day before he was scheduled to check out, a nurse came running to him and his family and told them of a doctor who wanted to try a new kind of therapy.

Fuentes gave his permission. A one-foot needle was inserted into his body and a tiny piece of his tumor was extracted for biopsy. But Toti was resigned to his fate and did not think much about the new therapy. He concentrated his remaining energy on getting his effects in order and on his family.

"I was home for two weeks just waiting for death to come," he says. "But for some reason I asked my wife to buy a keyboard. The first thing I played was 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' and then I told myself that I must live. I still had things to do."

And just when his spirit was buoyed by his desire to battle the cancer, his family got a call from the doctor who was trying out the therapy.

"The doctor was screaming, telling my wife that the medication that he was using on the tumor was working," recalls Toti. "It is actually medication for leukemia but it is working on my cancer."

Sharing his talent

It has been a year since and Fuentes is active again in the music scene. Music saved him then and it is still saving him today, he says.

"I think that if I am not a musician, I would have been dead by now because there is no healing," he says. "It is the music that is keeping me alive."

He also believes God has a reason for keeping him alive when all the odds were against him. He does not know it yet, but he feels it has something to do with sharing more of his talent with others and offering compassion to those in need.

Toti spearheaded a fund-raising walk and concert for indigent cancer patients on Dec. 19, under the program "A Celebration of Life."

A walk and a concert

The first part of the program will be marked by a walk by Toti and his son Damien from the Santuario de San Antonio in Forbes Park to Oakwood Park, where they were joined by other cancer survivors and supporters. From there, they proceeded to the Greenbelt 3 chapel.

The second part was a concert "A Song for Life," with Toti at the keyboard, at Merk's Bar Bistro at Greenbelt 3.

"I feel so good these days," says Toti.

RD-600 Roland

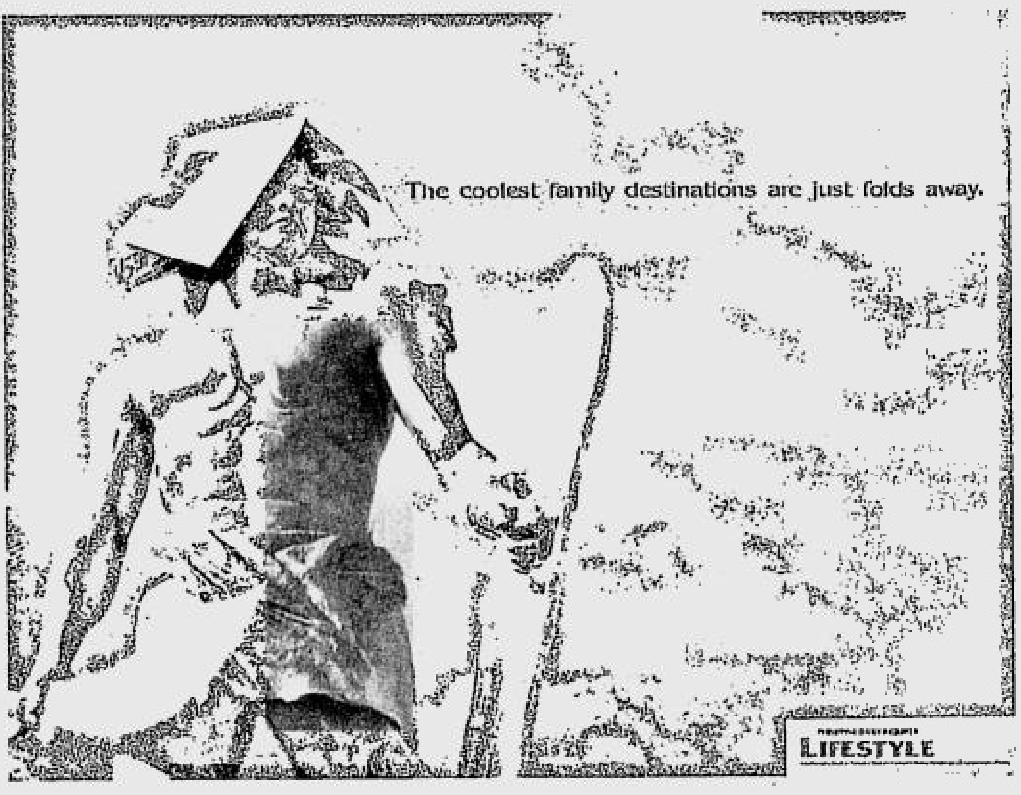
"I'M PAINLESS," declares Toti Fuentes

"I am more creative musically. I write and arrange songs faster than I ever did. I am also busy enjoying life and I thank God every day that I am still breathing."

Toti is down to 140 pounds but he says he is as healthy as he could be given his situation. The tumor took away 60 percent of his stomach, so he can only eat small quantities of food every two hours to keep in shape.

He does not mind the little inconveniences; he is just thankful to be alive. And he wants others to feel alive, too, through his music.

"Maybe my mission is to help other cancer victims and use my talent to make others aware of how lucky we are to be alive," he says.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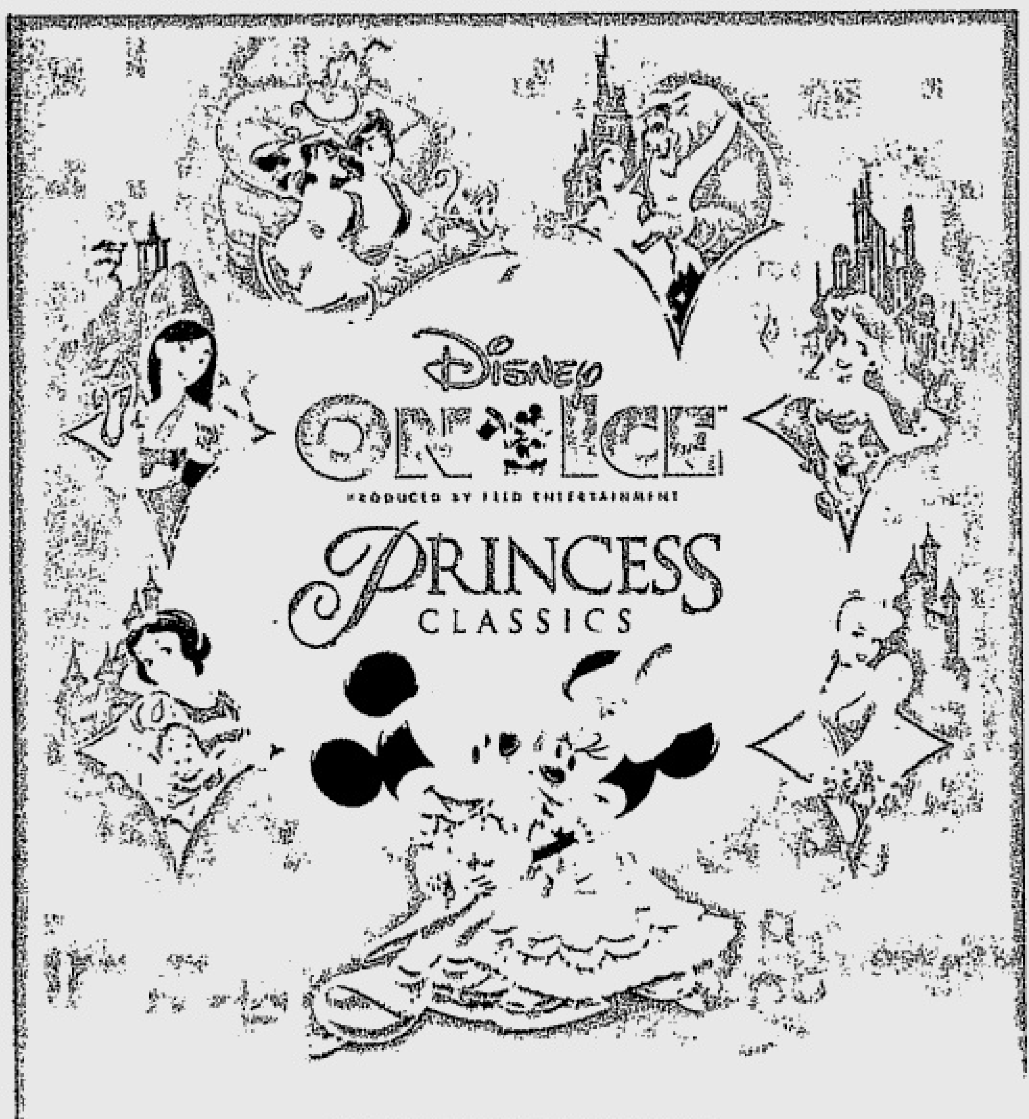

Very Limited Engagement
Dec. 25, 2004 to Jan. 3, 2005
ARANETA COLISEUM

SHOW SKED

DATE	DAY	TIME
Dec.29	Wed	2 pm, 6 pm
Dec.30	Thu	2 pm, 6 pm
Jan. 1	Sat	1 pm, 4:30 pm, 8 pm
Jan. 2	Sun	2 pm, 6 pm
Jan. 3	Mon	6 pm

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IN RIO'S MEMORY

Boy sings!

"IT FELT GOOD," says Boy Abunda of his first recording

IT SEEMS television host and talent manager Boy Abunda has embarked on another aspect of his multifaceted career.

He recently recorded an inspirational song, "All My Love," composed by Edith Gallardo, with music by Nino Regalado.

It is a first time for Boy, who never thought he would do anything like it.

"When I was invited to do a song for this album, I said yes, even while knowing that I couldn't sing like a pro," Boy recounts. "But when I went to [the studio] prepared to record awful noise, God apparently blessed all the bad notes. Because of Margot and Edith Gallardo, and through God's infinite kindness, I did it—my first ever recorded song—and it felt good."

"All My Love" is only one of 12 songs in the inspirational album, "The Joys of Healing," featuring Backroom Inc. artists Gretchen Barretto, The Company, Erik Santos, Ima Castro, Kim Flores, Ayen Munji Laurel, Raymond Bagatsing, Calvin Millado, Andre Castillo and Ai Ai delas Alas.

Boy is president of Backroom.

Dedicated to Rio

The Company renders the title song, "The Joys of Healing," as well as "Walang Kasing Saya." Erik wonders, "What Will I Do, My Lord?" while Ima Castro affirms her faith with "My God and Me." Kim Flores declares that "Only God" can heal a broken heart. Andre Castillo describes "The Best Day of My Life."

Gretchen Barretto revels in amazing "Hope," and Ai Ai de las Alas sings "Most of All."

Other songs contained are "I Said a Prayer for You" by Ayen Munji Laurel, "Similar Journey" by Raymond Bagatsing and "Thank You for the Good Life" by Calvin Millado.

Executive producer Armi P. Araujo confides, "Healed of cancer, I wondered how I could thank the Lord. He sent me this project and the people who would be instrumental in its production."

On the other hand, producer Margot Gallardo says the "heartwarming" collection is dedicated to the memory of Rio Diaz-Cojuangco, the actress/TV host and ex-politician who wrote the narration and prayers in the album.

"The Joys of Healing," distributed by Star Records, is now available in all major music stores nationwide.

AI AI de las Alas, "Most of All"

ERIK SANTOS, "What Will I Do, My Lord?"

IMA CASTRO, "My God and Me"